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INFINITY

SCIENCE FICTION

November, 1958

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ON WITH THE OLD

IN "FEEDBACK" this issue, there's an interesting (and gratifying) letter from S. B. Hough, who wrote the Infinity Award-winning novel, *First on Mars*, under the pseudonym of Rex Gordon. Mr. Hough is a successful detective story writer under his own name, I understand, but as Rex Gordon he is a relative newcomer to science fiction. His attitude toward his work is worth thinking about.

Old-time readers of science fiction sometimes complain that it's boring these days, because all of the new ideas have been used up, and writers are just repeating the old ones. To a certain extent this is true—necessarily, unavoidably so—but if writers (and editors) do their jobs well, the results don't have to be tiresome.

No writer can go on producing completely new ideas forever. What new ideas there are frequently come from the newer writers, those who haven't yet used up their stock of originality or found successful and well-paying

grooves for their writing. Older, more established writers often spend more thought and effort on perfecting their styles or indulging in more detailed examinations of familiar ideas or small facets of familiar ideas.

Even the newer writer runs a considerable risk of repeating ideas that have already been used these days, however. So much science-fiction has already been written that it's practically impossible for anyone just encountering the field now to find it all, much less read it all. The recent arrival can't know for sure what ideas have been used and what ideas are entirely fresh.

Fortunately, science fiction has a large appeal to young readers, and anyone reading sf for the first time will find it loaded with ideas and concepts that are new to him. To the newcomer, sf is always stimulating and exciting; unless the entire field is horribly mismanaged in the future, it always will be. Older readers may not always

find as many new ideas coming along as they'd like, and some of them will inevitably stop reading sf for this reason. Plenty of others, however, will stick around, and watch the writers inject greater scientific accuracy, investigate more closely the effects of science on human beings, and generally improve their literary styles while using the same basic plots and gimmicks.

Let's keep looking for totally new ideas, by all means! But let's not despair whenever we seem to have run out of them. The condition is probably only temporary in any case, and it needn't keep us from doing good work.

SPEAKING of new writers, they seem to come along in bunches. Last issue we had John F. Silletto and David C. Hodgkins, both new but both with very professional styles and pleasantly different viewpoints. This issue we have Webber Martin, a young Midwesterner with a background of newspaper work, who achieved the rather unusual feat of breaking into print for the first time with a short novel instead of a short story. Martin's basic plot is not particularly new, and he uses no startlingly different scientific concepts or devices. But he does probe deeply into the motives of his

characters, and he follows through relentlessly on the actions that would spring them from those motives, even though it results in an ending that definitely departs from formula. We're hoping for more stories from all three of these fine young writers, and fully expect them to get even better as they go along.

And to prove that older writers can break sharply from the kind of fiction everybody expects them to write, we have "Ozymandias" by Ivar Jorgenson. Jorgenson is, as everybody knows, one of the foremost producers of action-adventure science fiction. But the groove he had found was definitely not a rut, and "Ozymandias" could not possibly be described as an action-adventure story. It is, instead, exactly the kind of intellectually-stimulating speculation you would expect to find in any of the "better" science fiction writers, and establishes Jorgenson as a versatile man indeed. Knowing him, I'm sure he'll continue to produce both types of fiction, and perhaps others as well, all of it of high quality.

So, personally, I'm not worried. Science fiction is still a field with tremendous potential for development, and the future should hold plenty of good stories.—LTS

*The proteus could change its shape
to anything at all—and Herndon
discovered it made a perfect red herring!*

SPACEROGUE

By WEBBER MARTIN

CHAPTER I

THEY WERE selling a proteus in the public auctionplace at Borlaam, when the stranger wandered by. The stranger's name was Barr Herndon, and he was a tall man, with a proud, lonely face. It was not the face he had been born with, though his own had been equally proud, equally lonely.

He shouldered his way

through the crowd. It was a warm and muggy day and a number of idling passersby had stopped to watch the auction. The auctioneer was an Agozlid, squat and bull-voiced, and he held the squirming proteus at arm's length, squeezing it to make it perform.

"Observe, ladies and gentlemen—observe the shapes, the multitude of strange and exciting forms!"

Illustrated by ED EMSH



The proteus now had the shape of an eight-limbed star, blue-green at its core, fiery red in each limb. Under the auctioneer's merciless prodding it began to change, slowly, as its molecules lost their hold on one another and sought a new conformation.

A snake, a tree, a hooded deathworm—

The Agozlid grinned triumphantly at the crowd, baring fifty inch-long yellow teeth. "What am I bid?" he demanded in the guttural Borlaamese language. "Who wants this creature from another sun's world?"

"Five stellors," said a bright-painted Borlaamese noblewoman down front.

"Five stellors! Ridiculous, milady. Who'll begin with fifty? A hundred?"

Barr Herndon squinted for a better view. He had seen proteus lifeforms before, and knew something of them. They were strange, tormented creatures, living in agony from the moment they left their native world. Their flesh flowed endlessly from shape to shape, and each change was like the wrenching-apart of limbs by the rack.

"Fifty stellors," chuckled a member of the court of Seigneur Krellig, absolute ruler of the vast world of Borlaam. "Fifty for the proteus."

"Who'll say seventy-five?" pleaded the Agozlid. "I brought this being here at the cost of three lives, slaves worth more than a hundred between them. Will you make me take a loss? Surely five thousand stellors—"

"Seventy-five," said a voice. "Eighty," came an immediate response.

"One hundred," said the noblewoman in the front row.

The Agozlid's toothy face became mellow as the bidding rose spontaneously. From his vantage-point in the last row, Barr Herndon watched.

The proteus wriggled, attempted to escape, altered itself wildly and pathetically. Herndon's lips compressed tightly. He knew something himself of what suffering meant.

"Two hundred," he said.

"A new voice!" crowed the auctioneer. "A voice from the back row! Five hundred, did you say?"

"Two hundred," Herndon repeated coldly.

"Two-fifty," said a nearby noble promptly.

"And twenty-five more," a hitherto-silent circus proprietor said.

Herndon scowled. Now that he had entered into the situation, he was—as always—fully committed to it. He would not let the others get the proteus.

"Four hundred," he said.

For an instant there was silence in the auction-ring, silence enough for the mocking cry of a low-swooping seabird to be clearly audible. Then a quiet voice from the front said, "Four-fifty."

"Five hundred," Herndon said.

"Five-fifty."

Herndon did not immediately reply, and the Agozlid auctioneer craned his stubby neck, looking around for the next bidder. "I've heard five-fifty," he said crooningly. "That's good, but not good enough."

"Six hundred," Herndon said.

"Six-twenty-five."

Herndon fought down a savage impulse to draw his needler and gun down his bidding opponent. Instead he tightened his jaws and said, "Six-fifty."

The proteus squirmed and became a pain-smitten pseudo-cat on the auction stand. The crowd giggled in delight.

"Six-seventy-five," came the voice.

IT HAD become a two-man contest now, with the others merely hanging on for the sport of it, waiting to see which man would weaken first. Herndon eyed his opponent: it was the courtier, a swarthy red-bearded man with blazing eyes and a double row of jewels round his doublet.

He looked immeasurably wealthy. There was no hope of outbidding him.

"Seven hundred stellors," Herndon said. He glanced around hurriedly, found a small boy standing nearby, and bent to whisper to him.

"Seven-twenty-five," said the noble.

Herndon whispered, "You see that man down front—the one who just spoke? Run down there and tell him his lady has sent for him, and wants him at once."

He handed the boy a golden five-stellor piece. The boy stared at it popeyed a moment, grinned, and slid through the onlookers toward the front of the ring.

"Nine hundred," Herndon said.

It was considerably more than a proteus might be expected to bring at auction, and possibly more than even the wealthy noble cared to spend. But Herndon was aware there was no way out for the noble except retreat—and he was giving him that avenue.

"Nine hundred is bid," the auctioneer said. "Lord Moaris, will you bid more?"

"I would," Moaris grunted. "But I am summoned, and must leave." He looked blankly angry, but he did not question the boy's message. Herndon noted that down for possible future use. It had been

a lucky guess—but Lord Moaris of the Seigneur's court came running when his lady bid him do so.

"Nine hundred is bid," the auctioneer repeated. "Do I hear more? Nine hundred for this fine proteus—who'll make it an even thousand?"

There was no one. Seconds ticked by, and no voice spoke. Herndon waited tensely at the edge of the crowd as the auctioneer chanted, "At nine hundred once, at nine hundred for two, at nine hundred ultimate—

"Yours for nine hundred, friend. Come forward with your cash. And I urge you all to return in ten minutes, when we'll be offering some wonderful pink-hued maidens from Villidon." His hands described a feminine shape in the air with wonderfully obscene gusto.

Herndon came forward. The crowd had begun to dissipate, and the inner ring was deserted as he approached the auctioneer. The proteus had taken on a frog-like shape and sat huddled in on itself like a statue of gelatin.

Herndon eyed the foul-smelling Agozlid and said, "I'm the one who bought the proteus. Who gets my money?"

"I do," croaked the auctioneer. "Nine hundred stellors gold, plus thirty stellors fee, and the beast's yours."

Herndon touched the money-plate at his belt and a coil of hundred-stellor links came popping forth. He counted off nine of them, broke the link, and laid them on the desk before the Agozlid. Then he drew six five-stellor pieces from his pocket and casually dropped them on the desk.

"Let's have your name for the registry," said the auctioneer after counting out the money and testing it with a soliscope.

"Barr Herndon."

"Home-world?"

Herndon paused a moment. "Borlaam."

The Agozlid looked up. "You don't seem much like a Borlaamese to me. Pure-bred?"

"Does it matter to you? I am. I'm from the River Country of Zonnigog, and my money's good."

Painstakingly the Agozlid inscribed his name in the registry. Then he glanced up insolently and said, "Very well, Barr Herndon of Zonnigog. You now own a proteus. You'll be pleased to know that it's already indoctrinated and enslaved."

"This pleases me very much," said Herndon flatly.

The Agozlid handed Herndon a bright planchet of burnished copper with a nine-digit number inscribed on it. "This is the code key. In case

you lose your slave, take this to Borlaam Central and they'll trace it for you." He took from his pocket a tiny projector and slid it across the desk. "And here's your resonator. It's tuned to a mesh network installed in the proteus on the submolecular level—it can't change to affect it. You don't like the way the beast behaves, just twitch the resonator. It's essential for proper discipline of slaves."

Herndon accepted the resonator. He said, "The proteus probably knows enough of pain without this instrument. But I'll take it."

The auctioneer seized the proteus and scooped it down from the auction-stand, dropping it next to Herndon. "Here you are, friend. All yours now."

The marketplace had cleared somewhat; a crowd had gathered at the opposite end, where some sort of jewel auction was going on, but as Herndon looked around he saw he had a clear path over the cobbled square to the quay beyond.

HE WALKED a few steps away from the auctioneer's booth. The auctioneer was getting ready for the next segment of his sale, and Herndon caught a glimpse of three frightened-looking naked Villidon girls behind the

curtain being readied for display.

He stared seaward. Two hundred yards away was the quay, rimmed by the low sea-wall, and beyond it was the bright green expanse of the Shining Ocean. For an instant his eyes roved beyond the ocean even, to the far continent of Zonnigog where he had been born. Then he looked at the terrified little proteus, halfway through yet another change of shape.

Nine hundred thirty-five stellors, altogether, for this proteus. Herndon scowled bitterly. It was a tremendous sum of money, far more than he could easily have afforded to throw away in one morning—particularly his first day back on Borlaam after his sojourn on the outplanets.

But there had been no help for it. He had allowed himself to be drawn into a situation, and he refused to back off halfway. Not any more, he said to himself, thinking of the burned and gutted Zonnigog village plundered by the gay looters of Seigneur Krelig's army.

"Walk toward the sea-wall," he ordered the proteus.

A half-formed mouth said blurredly, "M-master?"

"You understand me, don't you? Then walk toward the sea-wall. Keep going and don't turn around."

He waited. The proteus

formed feet and moved off in an uncertain shuffle over the well-worn cobbles. Nine hundred thirty-five stellors, he thought bitterly.

He drew his needler.

The proteus continued walking, through the marketplace and toward the sea. Someone yelled, "Hey, that thing's going to fall in! We better stop it!"

"I own it," Herndon called coolly. "Keep away from it, if you value your own lives."

He received several puzzled glances, but no one moved. The proteus had almost reached the edge of the seawall now, and paused indecisively. Not even the lowest of life-forms will welcome its own self-destruction, no matter what surcease from pain can be attained thereby.

"Mount the wall," Herndon called to it.

Blindly, the proteus obeyed. Herndon's finger caressed the firing-knob of the needler. He watched the proteus atop the low wall, staring down into the murky harbor water, and counted to three.

On the third count he fired. The slim needle-projectile sped brightly across the marketplace and buried itself in the back of the proteus' body. Death must have been instantaneous; the needle contained a nerve-poison that

was effective on all known forms of life.

The creature stood frozen on the wall an instant, caught midway between changes, and toppled forward into the water. Herndon nodded and holstered his weapon. He saw people's heads nodding. He heard a murmured comment: "Just paid almost a thousand for it, and first thing he does is shoot it."

It had been a costly morning. Herndon turned as if to walk on, but he found his way blocked by a small wrinkle-faced man who had come out of the jewelry-auction crowd across the way.

"My name is Bollar Benjin," the little prune of a man said. His voice was a harsh croak. His body seemed withered and skimpy. He wore a tight gray tunic of shabby appearance. "I saw what you just did."

"What of it? It's not illegal to dispose of slaves in public," Herndon said.

"Only a special kind of man would do it, though," said Bollar Benjin. "A cruel man—or a foolhardy one. Which are you?"

"Both," Herndon said. "And now, if you'll let me pass—"

"Just one moment." The croaking voice suddenly acquired the snap of a whip. "Talk to me a moment. If you can spare a thousand stellors to buy a slave you kill the

next moment, you can spare me a few words."

"What do you want with me?"

"Your services," Benjin said. "I can use a man like you. Are you free and unbonded?"

Herndon thought of the thousand stellors—almost half his wealth—that he had thrown away just now. He thought of the Seigneur Krellig, whom he hated and whom he had vowed so implacably to kill. And he thought of the wrinkled man before him.

"I am unbonded," he said. "But my price is high. What do you want, and what can you offer?"

Benjin smiled obliquely and dipped into a hidden pocket of his tunic. When he drew forth his hand, it was bright with glittering jewels.

"I deal in these," he said. "I can pay well."

The jewels vanished into the pocket again. "If you're interested," Benjin said. "come with me."

Herndon nodded. "I'm interested."

"Follow me, then."

CHAPTER II

HERNDON had been gone from Borlaam for a year, before this day. A year before—the seventeenth of the reign of the Seigneur Krellig—a band of looters had roared

through his home village in Zonnigog, destroying and killing. It had been a high score for the Herndon family—his father and mother killed in the first sally, his young brother stolen as a slave, his sister raped and ultimately put to death.

The village had been burned. And only Barr Herndon had escaped, taking with him twenty thousand stellors of his family's fortune and killing eight of the Seigneur's best men before departing.

He had left the system, gone to the nineteen-world complex of Meld, and on Meld XVII he had bought himself a new face that did not bear the tell-tale features of the Zonnigog aristocracy. Gone were the sharp, almost razorlike cheekbones, the pale skin, the wide-set black eyes, the nose jutting from the forehead.

For eight thousand stellors the surgeons of Meld had taken these things away and given him a new face: broad where the other had been high, tan-skinned, narrow-eyed, with a majestic hook of a nose quite unlike any of Zonnigog. He had come back wearing the guise of a spacerogue, a freebooter, an unemployed mercenary willing to sign on to the highest bidder.

The Meldian surgeons had changed his face, but they had not changed his heart.

Herndon nurtured the desire for revenge against Krellig—Krellig the implacable, Krellig the invincible, who cowered behind the great stone walls of his fortress for fear of the people's hatred.

Herndon could be patient. But he swore death to Krellig, someday and somehow.

He stood now in a narrow street in the Avenue of Bronze, high in the winding complex of streets that formed the Ancient Quarter of the City of Borlaam, capital of the world of the same name. He had crossed the city silently, not bothering to speak to his gnomelike companion Benjin, brooding only on his inner thoughts and hatred.

Benjin indicated a black metal doorway to their left. "We go in here," he said. He touched his full hand to the metal of the door and it jerked upward and out of sight. He stepped through.

Herndon followed and it was as if a great hand had appeared and wrapped itself about him. He struggled for a moment against the stasis-field.

"Damn you, Benjin, unwrap me!"

The stasis-field held; calmly, the little man bustled about Herndon, removing his needler and his four-chambered blaster and the ceremonial sword at his side.

"Are you weaponless?" Benjin asked. "Yes; you must be. The field subsides."

Herndon scowled. "You might have warned me. When do I get my weapons back?"

"Later," Benjin said. "Restrain your temper and come within."

He was led to an inner room where three men and a woman sat around a wooden conference table. He eyed the four—some curiously. The men comprised an odd mixture: one had the unmistakable stamp of noble birth on his face, while the other two had the coarseness of clay. As for the woman, she was hardly worth a second-look: slovenly, big-breasted, and raw-faced she was undoubtedly the mistress of one or more of the others.

Herndon stepped toward them.

Benjin said, "This is Barr Herndon, free spacerogue. I met him at the market. He had just bought a proteus at auction for nearly a thousand stellors. I watched him order the creature toward the seawall and put a needle in its back."

"If he's that free with his money," remarked the noble-seeming one in a rich bass voice, "What need does he have of our employ?"

"Tell us why you killed your slave," Benjin said.

Herndon smiled grimly. "It pleased me to do so."

One of the leather-jerkined commoners shrugged and said, "These spacerogues don't act like normal men. Benjin, I'm not in favor of hiring him."

"We need him," the withered man retorted. To Herndon he said, "Was your act an advertisement, perhaps? To demonstrate your willingness to kill and your indifference to the moral codes of humanity?"

"Yes," Herndon lied. It would only hurt his own cause to explain that he had bought and then killed the proteus only to save it from a century-long life of endless agony. "It pleased me to kill the creature. And it served to draw your attention to me."

Benjin smiled and said, "Good. Let me explain who we are, then. First, names: this is Heitman Oversk, younger brother of the Lord Moaris."

HERNDON stared at the noble. A second son—ah, yes. A familiar pattern. Second sons, propertyless but bearing within themselves the spark of nobility, frequently deviated into shadowy paths. "I had the pleasure of outbidding your brother this morning," he said.

"Outbidding Moaris? Impossible!"

Herndon shrugged. "His lady beckoned him in the mid-

dle of the auction, and he left. Otherwise the proteus would have been his, and I'd have nine hundred stellors more in my pocket right now."

"These two," Benjin said, indicating the commoners, "are named Dorgel and Razumod. They have full voice in our organization; we know no social distinctions. And this—" gesturing to the girl—"is Marya. She belongs to Dorgel, who does not object to making short-term loans."

Herndon said, "I object. But state your business with me, Benjin."

The dried little man said, "Fetch a sample, Razumod."

The burly commoner rose from his seat and moved into a dark corner of the poorly-lit room; he fumbled at a drawer for a moment, then returned with a gem that sparkled brightly even through his fisted fingers. He tossed it down on the table, where it gleamed coldly. Herndon noticed that neither Heitman Oversk nor Dorgel let their glance linger on the jewel more than a second, and he likewise turned his head aside.

"Pick it up," Benjin said.

The jewel was icy-cold. Herndon held it lightly and waited.

"Go ahead," Benjin urged. "Study it. Examine its depths.

It's a lovely piece, believe me."

Hesitantly Herndon opened his cupped palm and stared at the gem. It was broad-faceted, with a luminous inner light, and—he gasped—a face, within the stone. A woman's face, languorous, beckoning, seeming to call to him as from the depths of the sea—

Sweat burst out all over him. With an effort he wrenched his gaze from the stone and cocked his arm; a moment later he had hurled the gem with all his force into the farthest corner of the room. He whirled, glared at Benjin, and leaped for him.

"Cheat! Betrayer!"

His hands sought Benjin's throat, but the little man jumped lithely back, and Dorgel and Razumod interposed themselves hastily between them. Herndon stared at Razumod's sweaty bulk a moment and gave ground, quivering with tension.

"You might have warned me," he said.

Benjin smiled apologetically. "It would have ruined the test. We must have strong men in our organization. Oversk, what do you think?"

"He threw down the stone," Heitman Oversk said heavily. "It's a good sign. I think I like him."

"Razumod?"

The commoner gave an assenting grunt, as did Dorgel.

Herndon tapped the table and said, "So you're dealing in starstones? And you gave me one without warning? What if I'd succumbed?"

"We would have sold you the stone and let you leave," Benjin said.

"What sort of work would you have me do?"

Heitman Oversk said, "Our trade is to bring starstones in from the Rim worlds where they are mined, and sell them to those who can afford our price. The price, incidentally, is fifty thousand stellors. We pay eight thousand for them, and are responsible for shipping them ourselves. We need a supervisor to control the flow of starstones from our source world to Borlaem. We can handle the rest at this end."

"It, pays well," Benjin added. "Your wage would be five thousand stellors per month, plus a full voice in the organization."

Herndon considered. The starstone trade was the most vicious in the galaxy; the hypnotic gems rapidly became compulsive, and within a year after being exposed to one constantly a man lost his mind and became a drooling idiot, able only to contemplate the kaleidoscopic wonders locked within his stone.

The way to addiction was easy. Only a strong man could voluntarily rip his eyes

from a starstone, once he had glimpsed it. Herndon had proven himself strong. The sort of man who could slay a newly-purchased slave could look up from a starstone.

He said, "What are the terms?"

"Full bonding," Benjin said. "Including surgical implantation of a safety device."

"I don't like that."

"We all wear them," Oversk said. "Even myself."

"If all of you wear them," Herndon said, "To whom are you responsible?"

"There is joint control. I handle the outworld contacts; Oversk, here, locates prospective patrons. Dorgel and Razumod are expeditors who deal in collection problems and protection. We control each other."

"But there must be somebody who has the master-control for the safety devices," Herndon protested. "Who is that?"

"It rotates from month to month. I hold them this month," Benjin said. "Next month it is Oversk's turn."

HERNDON paced agitatedly up and down in the darkened room. It was a tempting offer; five thousand a month could allow him to live on high scales. And Oversk was the brother-of Lord Moaris, who was known to be the Seigneur's confidante.

And Lord Moaris' lady controlled Lord Moaris. Herndon saw a pattern taking shape, a pattern that ultimately would put the Seigneur Krellig within his reach.

But he did not care to have his body invaded by safety devices. He knew how those worked; if he were to cheat against the organization, betray it, attempt to leave it without due cause, whoever operated the master control could reduce him to a groveling pain-racked slave instantly. The safety-device could only be removed by the surgeon who had installed it.

It meant accepting the yoke of this group of starstone smugglers. But there was a higher purpose in mind for Herndon.

"I conditionally accept," he said. "Tell me specifically what my duties will be."

Benjin said, "A consignment of starstones has been mined for us on our source-world, and is soon to be shipped. We want you to travel to that world and accompany the shipment through space to Borlaam. We lose much by way of thievery on each shipment—and there is no way of insuring starstones against loss."

"We know who our thief is," Oversk said. "You would be responsible for finding him in the act and killing him."

"I'm not a murderer," Herndon said quietly.

"You wear the garb of a spacerogue. That doesn't speak of a very high moral caliber," Oversk said.

"Besides, no one mentions murder," said Benjin. "Merely execution. Yes: execution."

Herndon locked his hands together before him and said, "I want two months' salary in advance. I want to see evidence that all of you are wearing neuronc mesh under your skins before I let the surgeon touch me."

"Agreed," Benjin said after a questioning glance around the room.

"Furthermore, I want as an outright gift the sum of nine hundred thirty golden stellers, which I spent this morning to attract the attention of a potential employer."

It was a lie, but there was cause for it. It made sense to establish a dominating relationship with these people as soon as possible. Then later concessions on their part would come easier.

"Agreed," Benjin said again, more reluctantly.

"In that case," Herndon said. "I consider myself in your employ. I'm ready to leave tonight. As soon as the conditions I state have been fulfilled to my complete satisfaction, I will submit my

body to the hands of your surgeon."

CHAPTER III

HE BOUND himself over to the surgeon later that afternoon, after money to the amount of ten thousand, nine hundred thirty golden stellers had been deposited to his name in the Royal Borlaam Bank in Galaxy Square, and after he had seen the neuronc mesh that was embedded in the bodies of Benjin, Oversk, Dorgel, and Razumod. Greater assurance of good faith than this he could not demand; he would have to risk the rest.

The surgeon's quarters were farther along the Avenue of Bronze, in a dilapidated old house that had no doubt been built in Third Empire days. The surgeon himself was a wiry fellow with a puckered ray-slash across one cheek and a foreshortened left leg. A retired pirate-vessel medic, Herndon realized. No one else would perform such an operation unquestioningly. He hoped the man had skill.

The operation itself took an hour, during which time Herndon was under total anesthesia. He woke to find the copper operating-dome lifting off him. He felt no different, even though he knew a network of metal had been

blasted into his body on the submolecular level.

"Well? Is it finished?"

"It is," the surgeon said.

Herndon glanced at Benjin. The little man held a glinting metal object on his palm. "This is the control, Herndon. Let me demonstrate."

His hand closed, and instantaneously Herndon felt a bright bolt of pain shiver through the calf of his leg. A twitch of Benjin's finger and an arrow of red heat lanced Herndon's shoulder. Another twitch and a clammy hand seemed to squeeze his heart.

"Enough!" Herndon shouted. He realized he had signed away his liberty forever, if Benjin chose to exert control. But it did not matter to him. He had actually signed away his liberty the day he had vowed to watch the death of the Seigneur Krellig.

Benjin reached into his tunic-pocket and drew forth a little leather portfolio. "Your passport and other travelling necessities," he explained.

"I have my own passport," Herndon said.

Benjin shook his head. "This is a better one. It comes with a visa to Vyapore." To the surgeon he said, "How soon can he travel?"

"Tonight, if necessary."

"Good. Herndon, you'll leave tonight."

THE SHIP was the *Lord Nathiir*, a magnificent superliner bound on a thousand light-year cruise to the Rim stars. Benjin had arranged for Herndon to travel outward on a luxury liner without cost, as part of the entourage of Lord and Lady Moaris. Oversk had obtained the job for him—second steward to the noble couple, who were vacationing on the Rim pleasure-planet of Mollecogg. Herndon had not objected when he learned that he was to travel in the company of Lord—and especially Lady—Moaris.

The ship was the greatest of the Borlaam luxury fleet. Even on Deck C, in his steward's quarters, Herndon rated a full-grav room with synthik drapery and built-in chromichron; he had never lived so well even at his parent's home, and they had been among the first people of Zonnigog at one time.

His duties called for him to pay court upon the nobles each evening, so that they might seem more resplendent in comparison with the other aristocrats travelling aboard. The Moarises had brought the largest entourage with them, over a hundred people including valets, stewards, cooks, and paid sycophants.

Alone in his room during the hour of blastoff, Herndon studied his papers. A visa to

Vyapore. So *that* was where the starstones came from—! Vyapore, the jungle planet of the Rim, where civilization barely had a toehold. No wonder the starstone trade was so difficult to control.

When the ship was safely aloft and the stasis generators had caused the translation into nullspace, Herndon dressed in the formal black-and-red court garments of Lord Moaris' entourage. Then, making his way up the broad companionway, he headed for the Grand Ballroom, where Lord Moaris and his lady were holding court for the first night of the voyage outward.

The ballroom was festooned with ropes of living light. A dancing bear from Albireo XII cavorted clumsily near the entrance as Herndon entered. Borlaamese in uniforms identical to his own stood watch at the door, and nodded to him when he identified himself as Second Steward.

He stood for a moment alone at the threshold of the ballroom, watching the glittering display. The *Lord Nathiir* was the playground of the wealthy, and a goodly number of Borlaam's wealthiest were here, vying with the ranking nobles, the Moarises, for splendor.

Herndon felt a twinge of bitterness. His people were

from beyond the sea, but by rank and preference he belonged in the bright lights of the ballroom, not standing here in the garment of a steward. He moved forward.

The noble couple sat on raised thrones at the far end, presiding over a dancing-area in which the grav had been turned down; the couples drifted gracefully, like figures out of fable, feet touching the ground only at intervals.

Herndon recognized Lord Moaris from the auction. A dour, short, thick-bodied individual he was, resplendent in his court robes, with a fierce little beard stained bright red after the current fashion. He sat stiffly upright on his throne, gripping the armrests of the carven chair as if he were afraid of floating off toward the ceiling. In the air before him shimmered the barely perceptible haze of a neutralizer field designed to protect him from the shots of a possible assassin.

By his side sat his Lady, supremely self-possessed and lovely. Herndon was astonished by her youth. No doubt the nobles had means of restoring lost freshness to a woman's face, but there was no way of recreating the youthful bloom so convincingly. The Lady Moaris could not have been more than twenty-three or twenty-five.

Her husband was several decades older. It was small wonder that he guarded her so jealously.

She smiled in sweet content at the scene before her. Herndon, too, smiled—at her beauty, and at the use to which he hoped to put it. Her skin was soft pink; a wench of the bath Herndon had met belowdecks had told him she bathed in the cream of the ying-apple twice daily. Her eyes were wide-set and clear, her nose finely made, her lips two red arching curves. She wore a dress studded with emeralds; it flowed from her like light. It was open at the throat, revealing a firm bosom and strong shoulders. She clutched a diamond-crusted scepter in one small hand.

Herndon looked around, found a lady of the court who was unoccupied at the moment, and asked her to dance. They danced silently, gliding in and out of the grav field; Herndon might have found it a pleasant experience, but he was not primarily in search of pleasant experiences now. He was concerned only with attracting the attention of the Lady Moaris.

He was successful. It took time; but he was by far the the biggest and most conspicuous man of the court assembled there, and it was customary for Lord and Lady to leave their thrones, mingle

with their courtiers, even dance with them. Herndon danced with lady after lady, until finally he found himself face to face with the Lady Moaris.

"Will you dance with me?" she asked. Her voice was like liquid gossamer.

Herndon lowered himself in a courtly bow. "I would consider it the greatest of honors, good Lady."

They danced. She was easy to hold; he sensed her warmth near him, and he saw something in her eyes—a distant pinched look of pain, perhaps—that told him all was not well between Lord and Lady.

She said, "I don't recognize you. What's your name?"

"Barr Herndon, milady. Of Zonnigog."

"Zonnigog, indeed! And why have you crossed ten thousand miles of ocean to our city?"

Herndon smiled and gracefully dipped her through a whirling series of pirouettes. "To seek fame and fortune, milady. Zonnigog is well and good to live in, but the place to become known is the City of Borlaam. For this reason I petitioned the Heitman Oversk to have me added to the retinue of the Lord Moaris."

"You know Oversk, then? Well?"

"Not at all well. I served

him a while; then I asked to move on."

"And so you go, climbing up and over your former masters, until you scramble up the shoulders of the Lord Moaris to the feet of the Seigneur. Is that the plan?"

She smiled disarmingly, drawing any possible malice from the words she had uttered. Herndon nodded, saying in all sincerity, "I confess this is my aim. Forgive me, though, for saying that there are reasons that might cause me to remain in the service of the Lord Moaris longer than I had originally intended."

A flush crossed her face. She understood. In a half-whisper she said, "You are impertinent. I suppose it comes with good looks and a strong body."

"Thank you, milady."

"I wasn't complimenting you," she said as the dance came to an end and the musicians subsided. "I was criticizing. But what does it matter? Thank you for the dance."

"May I have the pleasure of milady's company once again soon?" Herndon asked.

"You may—but not too soon." She chuckled. "The Lord Moaris is highly possessive. He resents it when I dance twice the same evening with one member of the court."

Sadness darkened Hern-

don's face a moment. "Very well, then. But I will go to Viewplate A and stare at the stars a while. If the Lady seeks a companion, she will find one there."

She stared at him and flurried away without replying. But Herndon felt a glow of inner satisfaction. The pieces were dropping into place.

The ladder was being constructed. Soon it would bring him to the throneroom of the Seigneur Krellig. Beyond that he would need no plans.

VIEWPLATE A, on the uppermost deck of the vast liner, was reserved for the first-class passengers and the members of their retinues. It was an enormous room, shrouded at all times in darkness, at one end of which a viewscreen opened out onto the glory of the heavens. In nullspace, a hyperbolic section of space was visible at all times, the stars in weird out-of-focus colors forming a breathtaking display. Geometry went awry. A blazing panorama illuminated the room.

The first-class viewing room was also known to be a trysting-place. There, under cover of darkness, ladies might meet and make love to cooks, lords to scullery-maids. An enterprising rogue with a nolight camera might make a fortune taking a quick shot of such a room and black-

mailing his noble victims. But scanners at the door prevented such devices from entering.

Herndon stood staring at the fiery gold and green of the closest stars a while, his back to the door, until he heard a feminine voice whisper to him.

"Barr Herndon?"

He turned. In the darkness it was difficult to tell who spoke; he saw a girl about the height of the Lady Moaris, but in the dimness of the illumination of the plate he could see it was not the Lady. This girl's hair was dull red; the Lady's was golden. And he could see the pale whiteness of this girl's breasts; the Lady's garment, while revealing, had been somewhat more modest.

This was a lady of the court, then, perhaps enamoured of Herndon, perhaps sent by the Lady Moaris as a test or as a messenger.

Herndon said, "I am he. What do you want?"

"I bring a message from—a noble lady," came the answering whisper.

Smiling in the darkness Herndon said, "What does your mistress have to say to me?"

"It cannot be spoken. Hold me in a close embrace as if we were lovers, and I will give you what you need."

Shrugging, Herndon

clasped the go-between in his arms with feigned passion. Their lips met; their bodies pressed tight. Herndon felt the girl's hand searching for his, and slipping something cool, metallic into it. Her lips left his, travelled to his ear, and murmured:

"This is her key. Be there in half an hour."

They broke apart. Herndon nodded farewell to her and returned his attention to the glories of the viewplate. He did not glance at the object in his hand, but merely stored it in his pocket.

He counted out fifteen minutes in his mind, then left the viewing-room and emerged on the main deck. The ball was still in progress, but he learned from a guard on duty that the Lord and Lady Moaris had already left for sleep, and that the festivities were soon to end.

Herndon slipped into a washroom and examined the key—for key it was. It was a radionic opener, and imprinted on it were the numbers 1160.

His throat felt suddenly dry. The Lady Moaris was inviting him to her room for the night—or was this a trap, and would Moaris and his court be waiting for him, to gun him down and provide themselves with some amusement? It was not beyond

these nobles to arrange such a thing.

But still—he remembered the clearness of her eyes, and the beauty of her face. He could not believe she would be party to such a scheme.

He waited out the remaining fifteen minutes. Then, moving cautiously along the plush corridors, he found his way to Room 1160.

He listened a moment. Silence from within. His heart pounded frantically, irking him; this was his first major test, possibly the gateway to all his hopes, and it irritated him that he felt anxiety.

He touched the tip of the radionic opener to the door. The substance of the door blurred as the energy barricade that composed it was temporarily dissolved. Herndon stepped through quickly. Behind him, the door returned to a state of solidity.

The light of the room was dim. The Lady Moaris awaited him, wearing a gauzy dressing-gown. She smiled tensely at him; she seemed ill-at-ease.

"Would I do otherwise?"

"I—wasn't sure. I'm not in the habit of doing things like this."

Herndon repressed a cynical smile. Such innocence was touching, but highly improbable. He said nothing, and she went on: "I was caught by your face—something harsh

and terrible about it struck me. I had to send for you, to know you better."

Ironically Herndon said, "I feel honored. I hadn't expected such an invitation."

"You won't—think it's cheap of me, will you?" she said plaintively. It was hardly the thing Herndon expected from the lips of the noble Lady Moaris. But, as he stared at her slim body revealed beneath the filmy robe, he understood that she might not be so noble after all once the gaudy pretense was stripped away. He saw her as perhaps she truly was: a young girl of great loveliness, married to a domineering nobleman who valued her only for her use in public display. It might explain this bedchamber summons to a Second Steward.

He took her hand. "This is the height of my ambitions, milady. Beyond this room, where can I go?"

But it was empty flattery he spoke. He darkened the room illumination exultantly. *With your conquest, Lady Moaris*, he thought, *do I begin the conquest of the Seigneur Krellig!*

CHAPTER IV

THE VOYAGE to Molleccogg lasted a week, absolute time aboard ship. After their night together, Hern-

don had occasion to see the Lady Moaris only twice more, and on both occasions she averted her eyes from him, regarding him as if he were not there.

It was understandable. But Herndon held a promise from her that she would see him again in three months' time, when she returned to Borlaam; and she had further promised that she would use her influence with her husband to have Herndon invited to the court of the Seigneur.

The *Lord Nathiir* emerged from nullspace without difficulty and was snared by the landing-field of Milleccogg Spacefield. Through the viewing-screen on his own deck, Herndon saw the colorful splendor of the pleasure-planet on which they were about to land, growing larger now that they were in the final spiral.

But he did not intend to remain long on the world of Molleccogg.

He found the Chief Steward and applied for a leave of absence from Lord Moaris' service, without pay.

"But you've just joined us," the Steward protested. "And now you want to leave?"

"Only for a while," Herndon said. "I'll be back on Borlaam before any of you are. I have business to attend to on another world in the Rim area, and then I promise to

return to Borlaam at my own expense to rejoin the retinue of the Lord Moaris."

The Chief Steward grumbled and complained, but he could not find anything particularly objectionable in Herndon's intentions, and so finally he reluctantly granted the spacerogue permission to leave Lord Moaris' service temporarily. Herndon packed his court costume and clad himself in his old spacerogue garb; when the great liner ultimately put down in Danzibool Harbor on Molleccogg, Herndon was packed and ready, and he slipped off ship and into the thronged confusion of the terminal.

Bollar Benjin and Heitman Oversk had instructed him most carefully on what he was to do now. He pushed his way past a file of vile-smelling lily-faced green Nnobonn and searched for a ticket-seller's window. He found one, eventually, and produced the prepaid travel vouchers Benjin had given him.

"I want a one-way passage to Vyapore," he said to the flat-featured, triple-eyed Guzmanno clerk who stared out from back of the wicker screen.

"You need a visa to get to Vyapore," the clerk said. "These visas are issued at infrequent intervals to certified personages. I don't see how you—"

"I have a visa," Herndon snapped, and produced it. The clerk blinked—one-two-three, in sequence—and his pale rose face flushed deep cerise.

"So you do," he remarked at length. "It seems to be in order. Passage will cost you eleven hundred sixty-five stellors of the realm."

"I'll take a third-class ship," Herndon said. "I have a paid voucher for such a voyage."

He handed it across. The clerk studied it for a long moment, then said: "You have planned this very well. I accept the voucher. Here."

Herndon found himself holding one paid passage to Vyapore aboard the freight-ship *Zalasar*.

The *Zalasar* turned out to be very little like the *Lord Nathiir*. It was an old fashioned unitube ship that rattled when it blasted off, shivered when it translated to nullspace, and quivered all the week-long journey from Molleccogg to Vyapore. It was indeed a third-class ship. Its cargo was hardware: seventy-five thousand dry-strainers, eighty thousand pressors, sixty thousand multiple fuse-screens, guarded by a supercargo team of eight taciturn Ludvuri. Herndon was the only human aboard. Humans did not often get visas to Vyapore.

They reached Vyapore seven days and a half after set-

ting out from Molleccogg. Ground temperature as they disembarked was well over a hundred. Humidity was overpowering. Herndon knew about Vyapore: it held perhaps five hundred humans, one spaceport, infinite varieties of deadly local life, and several thousand non-humans of all descriptions, some of them hiding, some of them doing business, some of them searching for starstones.

Herndon had been well briefed. He knew who his contact was, and he set about meeting him.

THERE was only one settled city on Vyapore, and because it was the only one it was nameless. Herndon found a room in a cheap boarding-house run by a swine-eared Dombuun, and washed the sweat from his face with the unpleasantly acrid water of the tap.

Then he went downstairs into the bright noonday heat. The stench of rotting vegetation drifted in from the surrounding jungle on a faint breeze. Herndon said at the desk, "I'm looking for a Vonnimooro named Mardlin. Is he around?"

"Over there," said the proprietor, pointing.

Mardlin the Vonnimooro was a small, weaselly-looking creature with the protuberant snout, untrustworthy yellow

eyes, and pebbly brown-purple fur of his people. He looked up when Herndon approached. When he spoke, it was in *lingua spacia* with a whistling, almost obscene inflection.

"You looking for me?"

"It depends," Herndon said. "Are you Mardlin?"

The jackal-creature nodded. Herndon lowered himself to a nearby seat and said in a quiet voice, "Bollar Benjin sent me to meet you. Here are my credentials."

He tossed a milky-white clouded cube on the table between them. Mardlin snatched it up hastily in his leathery claws and nudged the activator. An image of Bollar Benjin appeared in the cloudy depths, and a soft voice said, "Benjin speaking. The bearer of this cube is known to me, and I trust him fully in all matters. You are to do the same. He will accompany you to Borlaam with the consignment of goods."

The voice died away and the image of Benjin vanished. The jackal scowled. He muttered, "If Benjin sent a man to convey his goods, why must I go?"

Herndon shrugged. "He wants both of us to make the trip, it seems. What do you care? You're getting paid, aren't you?"

"And so are you," snapped Mardlin. "It isn't like Benjin

to pay two men to do the same job. And I don't like you, Rogue."

"Mutual," Herndon responded heartily. He stood up. "My orders say I'm to take the freighter *Dawnlight* back to Borlaam tomorrow evening. I'll meet you here one hour before to examine the merchandise."

HE MADE one other stop that day. It was a visit with Brennt, a jewelmonger of Vyapore who served as the funnel between the native starstone-miners and Benjin's courier, Mardlin.

Herndon gave his identifying cube to Brennt and said, once he had satisfactorily proven himself, "I'd like to check your books on the last consignment."

Brennt glanced up sharply. "We keep no books on starstones, idiot. What do you want to know?"

Herndon frowned. "We suspect our courier of diverting some of our stones to his own pocket. We have no way of checking up on him, since we can't ask for vouchers of any kind in starstone traffic."

The Vyaporan shrugged. "All couriers steal."

"Starstones cost us eight thousand stellors apiece," Herndon said. "We can't afford to lose any of them, at that price. Tell me how many

are being sent in the current shipment."

"I don't remember," Brennt said.

Scowling, Herndon said, "You and Mardlin are probably in league. We have to take his word for what he brings us—but always, three or four of the stones are defective. We believe he buys, say, forty stones from you, pays the three hundred twenty thousand stellors over to you from the account we provide, and then takes three or four from the batch and replaces them with identical but defective stones worth a hundred stellors or so apiece. The profit to him is better than twenty thousand stellors a voyage.

"Or else," Herndon went on, "You deliberately sell him defective stones at eight thousand stellors. But Mardlin's no fool, and neither are we."

"What do you want to know?" the Vyaporan asked.

"How many functional starstones are included in the current consignment?"

Sweat poured down Brennt's face. "Thirty-nine," he said after a long pause.

"And did you also supply Mardlin with some blanks to substitute for any of these thirty-nine?"

"N-no," Brennt said.

"Very good," said Herndon. He smiled. "I'm sorry to have

seemed so overbearing, but we had to find out this information. Will you accept my apologies and shake?"

He held out his hand. Brennt eyed it uncertainly, then took it. With a quick inward twitch Herndon jabbed a needle into the base of the other's thumb. The quick-acting truth-drug took only seconds to operate.

"Now," Herndon said; "the preliminaries are over. You understand the details of our earlier conversation. Tell me, now: how many starstones is Mardlin paying you for?"

Brennt's fleshless lips curled angrily, but he was defenseless against the drug. "Thirty-nine," he said.

"At what total cost?"

"Three hundred twelve thousand stellors."

Herndon nodded. "How many of those thirty-nine are actually functional starstones?"

"Thirty-five," Brennt said reluctantly.

"The other four are duds?"

"Yes."

"A sweet little racket. Did you supply Mardlin with the duds?"

"Yes. At two hundred stellors each."

"And what happens to the genuine stones that we pay for but that never arrive on Borlaam?"

Brennt's eyes rolled despairingly. "Mardlin—Mard-

lin sells them to someone else and pockets the money. I get five hundred stellors per stone for keeping quiet."

"You've kept very quiet today," Herndon said. "Thanks very much for the information, Brennt. I really should kill you—but you're much too valuable to us for that. We'll let you live, but we're changing the terms of our agreement. From now on we pay you only for actual functioning starstones, not for an entire consignment. Do you like that setup?"

"No," Brennt said.

"At least you speak truthfully now. But you're stuck with it. Mardlin is no longer courier, by the way. We can't afford a man of his tastes in our organization. I don't advise you try to make any deals with his successor, whoever he is."

He turned and walked out of the shop.

HERNDON knew that Brennt would probably notify Mardlin that the game was up immediately, so the Vonnimooro could attempt to get away. Herndon was not particularly worried about Mardlin's escaping, since he had a weapon that would work on the jackal-creature at any distance whatever.

But he had sworn an oath to safeguard the combine's interests, and Herndon was a

man of his oath. Mardlin was in possession of thirty-nine starstones for which the combine had paid. He did not want the Vonnimooro to take those with him.

He legged it across town hurriedly to the house where the courier lived while at the Vyapore end of his route. It took him fifteen minutes from Brennt's to Mardlin's—more than enough time for a warning.

Mardlin's room was on the second story. Herndon drew his weapon from his pocket and knocked.

"Mardlin?"

There was no answer. Herndon said, "I know you're in there, jackal. The game's all over. You might as well open the door and let me in."

A needle came whistling through the door, embedded itself against the opposite wall after missing Herndon's head by inches. Herndon stepped out of range and glanced down at the object in his hand.

It was the master control for the neuronc network installed in Mardlin's body. It was quite carefully gradated; shifting the main switch to *six* would leave the Vonnimooro in no condition to fire a gun. Thoughtfully Herndon nudged the indicator up through the degrees of pain to *six*, and left it there.

He heard a thud within.

Putting his shoulder to the door, he cracked it open with one quick heave. He stepped inside. Mardlin lay sprawled in the middle of the floor, writhing in pain. Near him, but beyond his reach, lay the needler he had dropped.

A suitcase sat open and half-filled on the bed. He had evidently intended an immediate getaway.

"Shut...that...t h i n g... off..." Mardlin muttered through pain-twisted lips.

"First some information," Herndon said cheerfully. "I just had a talk with Brennt. He says you've been doing some highly improper things with our starstones. Is this true?"

Mardlin quivered on the floor but said nothing. Herndon raised the control a quarter of a notch, intensifying the pain but not yet bringing it to the killing range.

"Is this true?" he repeated.

"Yes—yes! Damn you, shut it off."

"At the time you had the network installed in your body, it was with the understanding that you'd be loyal to the combine and so it would never need to be used. But you took advantage of circumstances and cheated us. Where's the current consignment of stones?"

"...suitcase lining," Mardlin muttered.

"Good," Herndon said. He scooped up the needler, pocketed it, and shut off the master control switch. The pain subsided in the Vonnimooro's body, and he lay slumped, exhausted, too battered to rise.

Efficiently Herndon ripped away the suitcase lining and found the packet of starstones. He opened it. They were wrapped in shielding tissue that protected any accidental viewer. He counted through them; there were thirty-nine, as Brennt had said.

"Are any of these defective?" he asked.

Mardlin looked up from the floor with eyes yellow with pain and hatred. "Look through them and see."

Instead of answering, Herndon shifted the control switch past six again. Mardlin doubled up, clutching his head with clawlike hands. "Yes! Yes! Six defectives!"

"Which means you sold six good ones for forty-eight thousand stellors, less the three thousand you kicked back to Brennt to keep quiet. So there should be forty-five thousand stellors here that you owe us. Where are they?"

"Dresser drawer...top..."

Herndon found the money, neatly stacked. A second time he shut off the control device, and Mardlin relaxed.

"Okay," Herndon said. "I have the cash and I have the

stones. But there must be thousands of stellors that you've previously stolen from us."

"You can have that too! Only don't turn that thing on again, please!"

Shrugging, Herndon said, "There isn't time for me to hunt down the other money you stole for us. But we can ensure against your doing it again."

He fulfilled the final part of Benjin's instructions by turning the control switch to ten, the limit of sentient endurance. Every molecule of Mardlin's wiry body felt unbearable pain; he screamed and danced on the floor, but only for a moment. Nerve cells unable to handle the overload of pain stimuli short-circuited. In seconds, his brain was paralyzed. In less than a minute he was dead, though his tortured limbs still quivered with convulsive post-mortuary jerks.

Herndon shut the device off. He had done his job. He felt neither revulsion nor glee. All this was merely the preamble to what he regarded as his ultimate destiny.

He gathered up jewels and money and walked out.

CHAPTER V

A MONTH later, he arrived on Borlaam via the freighter *Dawnlight*, as

scheduled, and passed through customs without difficulty despite the fact that he was concealing more than three hundred thousand stellors' worth of proscribed starstones on his person.

His first stop was the Avenue of Bronze, where he sought out Benjin and the Heitman Oversk.

He explained crisply and briefly his activities since leaving Borlaam, neglecting to mention the matter of the shipboard romance with the Lady Moaris. While he spoke, both Benjin and Oversk stared eagerly at him, and when he told of intimidating Brennt and killing the treacherous Mardlin they beamed.

Herndon drew the packet of starstones from his cloak and laid them on the wooden table. "There," he said. "The starstones. There were some defectives, as you know, and I've brought back cash for them." He added forty-five thousand stellors to the pile.

Benjin quickly caught up the money and the stones and said, "You've done well, Herndon. Better than we expected. It was a lucky day when you killed that proteus."

"Will you have more work for me?"

Oversk said, "Of course. You'll take Mardlin's place as the courier. Didn't you realize that?"

Herndon had realized it, but it did not please him. He wanted to remain on Borlaam, now that he had made himself known to the Lady Moaris. He wanted to begin his climb toward Krellig. And if he were to shuttle between Vyapore and Borlaam, the all-important advantage he had attained would be lost.

But the Lady Moaris would not be back on Borlaam for nearly two months. He could make one more round-trip for the combine without seriously endangering his position. After that, he would have to find some means of leaving their service. Of course, if they preferred to keep him on they could compel him, but—

"When do I make the next trip?" he asked.

Benjin shrugged lazily. "Tomorrow, next week, next month—who knows? We have plenty of stones on hand. There is no hurry for the next trip. You can take a vacation now, while we sell these."

"No," Herndon said. "I want to leave immediately."

Oversk frowned at him. "Is there some reason for the urgency?"

"I don't want to stay on Borlaam just now," Herndon said. "There's no need for me to explain further. It pleases me to make another trip to Vyapore."

"He's eager," Benjin said. "It's a good sign."

"Mardlin was eager at first too," Oversk remarked balefully.

Herndon was out of his seat and at the nobleman's throat in an instant. His needler grazed the skin of Oversk's adam's-apple.

"If you intend by that comparison to imply—"

Benjin tugged at Herndon's arm. "Sit down, rogue, and relax. The Heitman is tired tonight, and the words slipped out. We trust you. Put the needler away."

Reluctantly Herndon lowered the weapon. Oversk, white-faced despite his tan, fingered his throat where Herndon's weapon had touched it, but said nothing. Herndon regretted his hasty action, and decided not to demand an apology. Oversk still could be useful to him.

"A spacerogue's word is his bond," Herndon said. "I don't intend to cheat you. When can I leave?"

"Tomorrow, if you wish," Benjin said. "We'll cable Brennt to have another shipment ready for you."

THIS TIME he travelled to Vyapore aboard a transport freighter, since there were no free tours with noblemen to be had at this season. He reached the jungle world a little less than a month later.

Brennt had thirty-two jewels waiting for him. Thirty-two glittering little starstones, each in its protective sheath, each longing to rob some man's mind away with its beckoning dreams.

Herndon gathered them up and arranged a transfer of funds to the amount of two hundred fifty-six thousand stellors. Brennt eyed him bitterly throughout the whole transaction, but it was obvious that the Vyaporan was in fear for his life, and would not dare attempt duplicity. No word was said of Mardlin or his fate.

Bearing his precious burden, Herndon returned to Borlaam aboard a second-class liner out of Diirhav, a neighboring world of some considerable population. It was expensive, but he could not wait for the next freight ship. By the time he returned to Borlaam the Lady Moaris would have been back several weeks. He had promised the Steward he would rejoin Moaris' service, and it was a promise he intended to keep.

It had become winter when he reached Borlaam again with his jewels. The daily sleet-rains sliced across the cities and the plains, showering them with billions of icy knife-like particles. People huddled together, waiting for the wintry cold to end.

Herndon made his way

through streets clogged with snow that glistened blue-white in the light of the glinting winter moon, and delivered his gems to Oversk in the Avenue of Bronze. Benjin, he learned, would be back shortly; he was engaged in an important transaction.

Herndon warmed himself by the heat-wall and accepted cup after cup of Oversk's costly Thrucian blue wine to ease his inner chill. The commoner Dorgel entered after a while, followed by Marya and Razumod, and together they examined the new shipment of starstones Herndon had brought back, storing them with the rest of their stock.

At length Benjin entered. The little man was almost numb with cold, but his voice was warm as he said, "The deal is settled, Oversk! Oh—Herndon—you're back, I see. Was it a good trip?"

"Excellent," Herndon said.

Oversk remarked, "You saw the Secretary of State, I suppose. Not Krellig himself."

"Naturally. Would Krellig let someone like me into his presence?"

Herndon's ears rose at the mention of his enemy's name. He said, "What's this about the Seigneur?"

"A little deal," Benjin chortled. "I've been doing some very delicate negotiating while you were away. And

I signed the contract today."

"What contract?" Herndon demanded.

"We have a royal patron now, it seems. The Seigneur Krellig has gone into the starstone business himself. Not in competition with us, though. He's bought a controlling interest in us."

Herndon felt as if his vital organs had been transmuted to lead. In a congealed voice he said, "And what are the terms of this agreement?"

"Simple. Krellig realized the starstone trade, though illegal, was unstoppable. Rather than alter the legislation and legalize the trade, which would be morally undesirable and which would also tend to lower the price of the gems, he asked the Lord Moaris to place him in contact with some group of smugglers who would work for the Crown. Moaris, naturally, suggested his brother, Oversk preferred to let me handle the negotiations, and for the past month I've been meeting secretly with Krellig's Secretary of State to work out a deal."

"The terms of which are?"

"Krellig guarantees us immunity from prosecution, and at the same time promises to crack down heavily on our competition. He pledges us a starstone monopoly, in other words, and so we'll be able to lower our price to Brennt

and jack up the selling price to whatever the traffic will bear. In return for this we turn over eight per cent of our gross profits to the Seigneur, and agree to supply him with six starstones annually, at cost, for the Seigneur to use as gifts to his enemies. Naturally we also transfer our fealties from the combine to the Seigneur himself. He holds our controls to assure loyal service."

Herndon sat as if stunned. His hands felt chilled; coldness rippled through his body. Loyalty to Krellig? His enemy, the person he had sworn to destroy?

The conflict seared through his mind and body. How could he fulfill his earlier vow, now that this diametrically opposed one was in effect? Transfer of fealty was a common thing. By the terms of Benjin's agreement, Herndon now was a sworn vassal of the Seigneur.

If he killed Krellig, that would violate his bond. If he served the Seigneur in all faith, he would break trust with himself and leave home and parents unavenged. It was an impossible dilemma. He quivered with the strain of resolving it.

"The spacerogue doesn't look happy about the deal," Oversk commented. "Or are you sick, Herndon?"

"I'm all right," Herndon



said stonily. "It's the cold outside, that's all. Chills a man."

Faalty to Krellig! Behind his back they had sold themselves and him to the man he hated most. Herndon's ethical code was based entirely on the concept of loyalty and unswerving obedience, of the sacred nature of an oath. But now he found himself bound to two mutually exclusive oaths. He was caught between them, racked and drawn apart; the only escape from the torment was death.

He stood up. "Excuse me," he said. "I have an appointment elsewhere in the city. You can reach me at my usual address if you need me for anything."

IT TOOK him the better part of a day to get to see the Chief Steward of Moaris Keep and explain to him that he had been unavoidably detained in the far worlds, and that he fully intended to re-enter the Moaris service and perform his duties loyally and faithfully. After quite some wrangling he was reinstated as one of the Second Stewards, and given functions to carry out in the daily life of the sprawling residence that was Moaris Keep.

Several days passed before he caught as much as a glimpse of the Lady Moaris. That did not surprise him;

the Keep covered fifteen acres of Borlaam City, and Lord and Lady occupied private quarters on the uppermost level, the rest of the huge place being devoted to libraries, ballrooms, art galleries, and other housings, for the Moaris treasures, all of these rooms requiring a daily cleaning by the household staff.

He saw her finally as he was passing through the fifth-level hallway in search of the ramp that would take him to his next task, cataloguing the paintings of the sixth-level gallery. He heard a rustle of crinoline first, and then she proceeded down the hall, flanked on each side by copper-colored Toppidan giants and in front and back by glistening-gowned ladies-in-waiting.

The Lady Moaris herself wore sheer garments that limned the shapely lines of her body. Her face was sad; it seemed to Herndon, as he saw her from afar, that she was under some considerable strain.

He stepped to one side to let the procession go past; but she saw him, and glanced quickly to the side at which he stood. Her eyes widened in surprise as she recognized him. He did not dare a smile. He waited until she had moved on, but inwardly he gloated. It was not difficult

to read the expression in her eyes.

Later that day, a blind Agozlid servant came up to him and silently handed him a sealed note. Herndon pocketed it, waiting until he was alone in a corridor that was safe from the Lord Moaris' spy-rays. He knew it was safe; the spy-ray in that corridor had been defective, and he himself had removed it that morning, meaning to replace it later in the day.

He broke the seal. The note said simply: *I have waited a month for you. Come to me tonight; M. is to spend the night at the Seigneur's palace. Karla will admit you.*

The photonicallly-sensitized ink faded from sight in a moment; the paper was blank. He thrust it in a disposal hatch, smiling.

He quietly made his way toward the eleventh-level chamber of the Lady Moaris when the Keep had darkened for the night. Her lady-in-waiting Karla was on duty, the bronze-haired one who had served as go-between aboard the *Lord Nathiir*. Now she wore night robes of translucent silk; a test of his fidelity, no doubt. Herndon carefully kept his eyes from her body and said, "I am expected."

"Yes. Come with me."

It seemed to him that the look in her eyes was a strange

one: desire, jealousy, hatred perhaps? But she turned and led him within, down corridors lit only with a faint nightglow. She nudged an opener; a door before him flickered and was momentarily nullified. He stepped through and it returned to the solid state behind him.

The Lady Moaris was waiting.

She wore only the filmiest of gowns, and the longing was evident in her eyes. Herndon said, "Is this safe?"

"It is. Moaris is away at Krellig's." Her lip curled in a bitter scowl. "He spends half his nights there, toying with the Seigneur's cast-off women. The room is sealed against spyrays. There's no way he can find out you've been here."

"And the girl—Karla? You trust her?"

"As much as I can trust anyone." Her arms sought his shoulders. "My rogue," she murmured. "Why did you leave us at Molleccogg?"

"Business of my own, milady."

"I missed you. Molleccogg was a bore without you."

Herndon smiled gravely. "Believe me, I didn't leave you because I chose to. But I had sworn to carry out duty elsewhere."

She pulled him urgently to her. Herndon felt pity for this lonely noblewoman, first

in rank among the ladies of the court, condemned to seek lovers among the stewards and grooms.

"Anything I have is yours," she promised him. "Ask for anything! Anything!"

"There is one prize you might secure for me," Herndon said grimly.

"Name it. The cost doesn't matter."

"There is no cost," Herndon said. "I simply seek an invitation to the court of the Seigneur. You can secure this through your husband. Will you do it for me?"

"Of course," she whispered. She clung to him hungrily. "I'll speak to Moaris—tomorrow."

CHAPTER VI

AT THE END of the week, Herndon visited the Avenue of Bronze and learned from Bollar Benjin that sales of the starstones proceeded well, that the arrangement under royal patronage was a happy one, and that they would soon be relieved of most of their stock. It would, therefore, be necessary for him to make another trip to Vyapore during the next several weeks. He agreed, but requested an advance of two months' salary.

"I don't see why not," Benjin agreed. "You're a valua-

ble man, and we have the money to spare."

He handed over a draft for ten thousand stellors. Herndon thanked him gravely, promised to contact him when it was time for him to make the journey to Vyapore and left.

That night he departed for Meld XVII, where he sought out the surgeon who had altered his features after his flight from sacked Zonnigog. He requested certain internal modifications. The surgeon was reluctant, saying the operation was a risky one, very difficult, and entailed a fifty per cent chance of total failure, but Herndon was stubborn.

It cost him twenty-five thousand stellors, nearly all the money he had, but he considered the investment a worthy one. He returned to Borlaam the next day. A week had elapsed since his departure.

He presented himself at Moaris Keep, resumed his duties, and once again spent the night with the Lady Moaris. She told him that she had wangled a promise from her husband, and that he was soon to be invited to court. Moaris had not questioned her motives, and she said the invitation was a certainty.

Some days later a message was delivered to him, addressed to Barr Herndon of

Zonnigog. It was in the hand of the private secretary to Moaris, and it said that the Lord Moaris had chosen to exert his patronage in favor of Barr Herndon, and that Herndon would be expected to pay his respects to the Seigneur Krellig.

The invitation from the Seigneur came later in the day, borne by a resplendent Toppidan footman, commanding him to present himself at the court reception the following evening, on pain of displeasing the Seigneur. Herndon exulted. He had attained the pinnacle of Borlaamese success, now; he was to be allowed into the presence of the sovereign. This was the culmination of all his planning.

He dressed in the court robes that he had purchased weeks before for just such an event—robes that had cost him more than a thousand stellors, sumptuous with inlaid precious gems and rare metals. He visited a tonsorial parlor and had an artificial beard affixed, in the fashion of many courtiers who disliked growing beards but who desired to wear them at ceremonial state functions. He was bathed and combed, perfumed, and otherwise prepared for his debut at court. He also made certain that the surgical modifications performed on him by the Meldi-

an doctor would be effective when the time came.

The shadows of evening dropped. The moons of Borlaam rose, dancing brightly across the sky. The evening fireworks display cast brilliant light through the winter sky, signifying that this was the birthmonth of Borlaam's Seigneur.

Herndon sent for the carriage he had hired. It arrived, a magnificent four-tube model bright with gilt paint, and he left his shabby dwelling-place. The carriage soared into the night sky; twelve minutes later, it descended in the courtyard of the Grand Palace of Borlaam, that monstrous heap of masonry that glowered down at the capital city from the impregnable vantage-point of the Hill of Fire.

Floodlights illuminated the Grand Palace. Another man might have been stirred by the imposing sight; Herndon merely felt an upwelling of anger. Once his family had lived in a palace too: not of this size, to be sure, for the people of Zonnigog were modest and unpretentious in their desires. But it had been a palace all the same, until the armies of Krellig razed it.

He dismounted from his carriage and presented his invitation to the haughty Seigneurial guards on duty. They admitted him, after checking

to see that he carried no concealed weapons, and he was conducted to an antechamber in which he found the Lord Moaris.

"So you're Herndon," Moaris said speculatively. He squinted and tugged at his beard.

Herndon compelled himself to kneel. "I thank you for the honor your Grace bestows upon me this night."

"You needn't thank me," Moaris grunted. "My wife asked for your name to be put on my invitation list. But I suppose you know all that. You look familiar, Herndon. Where have I seen you before?"

Presumably Moaris knew that Herndon had been employed in his own service. But he merely said, "I once had the honor of bidding against you for a captive proteus in the slave market, milord."

A flicker of recognition crossed Moaris' seamed face, and he smiled coldly. "I seem to remember," he said.

A gong sounded.

"We mustn't keep the Seigneur waiting," said Moaris. "Come."

Together, they went forward to the Grand Chamber of the Seigneur of Borlaam.

MOARIS entered first, as befitted his rank, and took his place to the left of the

monarch, who sat on a raised throne decked with violet and gold. Herndon knew protocol; he knelt immediately.

"Rise," the Seigneur commanded. His voice was a dry whisper, feathery-sounding, barely audible and yet commanding all the same. Herndon rose and stared levelly at Krellig.

The monarch was a tiny man, dried and fleshless; he seemed almost to be a humpback. Two beady, terrifying eyes glittered from a wrinkled, world-weary face. Krellig's lips were thin and bloodless, his nose a savage slash, his chin wedge-shaped.

Herndon let his eyes rove. The hall was huge, as he had expected; vast pillars supported the ceiling, and rows of courtiers flanked the walls. There were women, dozens of them; the Seigneur's mistresses, no doubt.

In the middle of the hall hung suspended something that looked to be a giant cage, completely cloaked in thick draperies of red velvet. Some pet of the Seigneur's probably lurked within: a vicious pet, Herndon theorized, possibly a Villidoni gyrfalcon, with honed talons.

"Welcome to the court," the Seigneur murmured. "You are the guest of my friend Moaris, eh?"

"I am, Sire," Herndon said. In the quietness of the hall

his voice echoed cracklingly.

"Moaris is to provide us all with some amusement this evening," remarked the monarch. The little man chuckled in anticipatory glee. "We are very grateful to your sponsor, the Lord Moaris, for the pleasure he is to bring us this night."

Herndon frowned. He wondered obscurely whether he was to be the source of amusement. He stood his ground unafraid; before the evening had ended, he himself would be amused at the expense of the others.

"Raise the curtain," Krellig commanded.

Instantly two Toppidan slaves emerged from the corners of the throneroom and jerked simultaneously on heavy cords that controlled the curtain over the cage. Slowly the thick folds of velvet lifted, revealing, as Herndon had suspected, a cage.

There was a girl in the cage.

She hung suspended by her wrists from a bar mounted at the roof of the cage. She was naked; the bar revolved, turning her like an animal trussed to a spit. Herndon froze, not daring to move, staring in sudden astonishment at the slim bare body dangling there.

It was a body he knew well.

The girl in the cage was the Lady Moaris.

Seigneur Krellig smiled benignly; he murmured in a gentle voice, "Moaris, the show is yours and the audience awaits. Don't keep us waiting."

MOARIS slowly moved toward the center of the ballroom floor. The marble under his feet was brightly polished and reflected him; his boots thundered as he walked.

He turned, facing Krellig, and said in a calm, controlled tone, "Ladies and gentlemen of the Seigneur's court, I beg leave to transact a little of my domestic business before your eyes. The lady in the cage, as most of you, I believe, are aware, is my wife."

A ripple of hastily-hushed comment was emitted by the men and women of the court. Moaris gestured and a spotlight flashed upward, illuminating the woman in the cage.

Herndon saw that her wrists were cruelly pinioned and that the blue veins stood out in sharp relief against her pale arms. She swung in a small circle as the bar above her turned in its endless rotation. Beads of sweat trickled down her back and down her stomach, and the harsh sobbing intake of her breath was audible in the silence.

Moaris said casually, "My wife has been unfaithful to

me. A trusted servant informed me of this not long ago: she has cheated me several times with no less a personage than an obscure member of our household, a groom or a lackey or some other person. When I questioned her, she did not deny this accusation. The Seigneur"—Moaris bowed in a throneward direction—"has granted me permission to chastise her here, to provide me with greater satisfaction and you with a moment of amusement."

Herndon did not move. He watched as Moaris drew from his sash a glittering little heat-gun. Calmly the nobleman adjusted the aperture to minimum. He gestured; a side of the cage slid upward, giving him free target.

He lifted the heat-gun.

Flick!

A bright tongue of flame licked out—and the girl in the cage uttered a little moan as a pencil-thin line was scared across her flanks.

Flick!

Again the beam played across her body. *Flick!* Again. Lines of pain were traced across her breasts, her throat, her knees, her back. She revolved helplessly as Moaris amused himself, carving line after line along her body with the heat-ray. It was only with an effort that Herndon held still. The members of the court chuckled as the

Lady Moaris writhed and danced in an effort to escape the inexorable lash of the beam.

'Moaris was an expert. He sketched patterns on her body, always taking care that the heat never penetrated below the upper surface of the flesh. It was a form of torture that might endure for hours, until the blood bubbled in her veins and she died.

Herndon realized the Seigneur was peering at him. "Do you find this courtly amusement to your taste, Herndon?" Krellig asked.

"Not quite, Sire." A hum of surprise rose that such a newcomer to the court should dare to contradict the Seigneur. "I would prefer a quicker death for the lady."

"And rob us of our sport?" Krellig asked.

"I would indeed do that," said Herndon. Suddenly he thrust open his jewelled cloak; the Seigneur cowered back as if he expected a weapon to come forth, but Herndon merely touched a plate in his chest, activating the device that the Meldian had implanted in his body. The neuronc mesh functioned in reverse; gathering a charge of deadly force, it sent the bolt surging along Herndon's hand. A bright arc of fire leaped from Herndon's pointing finger and surrounded the girl in the cage.

"Barr!" she screamed, breaking her silence at last, and died.

AGAIN Herndon discharged the neuronc force, and Moaris, his hands singed, dropped his heat-gun.

"Allow me to introduce myself," Herndon said, as Krellig stared whitefaced at him and the nobles of the court huddled together in fright. "I am Barr Herndon, son of the First Earl of Zonnigog. Somewhat over a year ago a courtier's jest roused you to lay waste to your fief of Zonnigog and put my family to the sword. I have not forgotten that day."

"Seize him!" Krellig shrieked.

"Anyone who touches me will be blasted with the fire," Herndon said. "Any weapon directed at me will recoil upon its owner. Hold your peace and let me finish.

"I am also Barr Herndon, Second Steward to Lord Moaris, and the lover of the woman who died before you. It must comfort you, Moaris, to know that the man who cuckolded you was no mere groom, but a noble of Zonnigog.

"I am also," Herndon went on, in the dead silence, "Barr Herndon the spacerogue, driven to take up a mercenary's trade by the destruction of my household. In that ca-

capacity I became a smuggler of starstones, and"—he bowed—"through an ironic twist, found myself owing a debt of fealty to none other than you, Seigneur.

"I hereby revoke that oath of fealty, Krellig—and for the crime of breaking an oath to my monarch, I sentence myself to death. But also, Krellig, I order a sentence of death upon your head for the wanton attack upon my homeland. And you, Moaris—for your cruel and barbaric treatment of this woman whom you never loved, you must die too.

"And all of you—you onlookers and sycophants, you courtiers and parasites, you too must die. And you, the court clowns, the dancing bears and captive life-forms of far worlds, I will kill you too, as once I killed a slave proteus—not out of hatred, but simply to spare you from further torment."

He paused. The hall was terribly silent; then someone to the right of the throne shouted, "He's crazy! Let's get out of here!"

He dashed for the great doors, which had been closed. Herndon let him get within ten feet of safety, then blasted him down with a discharge of life-force. The mechanism within his body recharged itself, drawing its power from the hatred within him and

discharging through his fingertips.

Herndon smiled at Lord Moaris, pale now. He said, "I'll be more generous to you than you to your Lady. A quick death for you."

He hurled a bolt of force at the nobleman. Moaris recoiled, but there was no hiding possible; he stood bathed in light for a moment, and then the charred husk dropped to the ground.

A second bolt raked the crowd of courtiers. A third Herndon aimed at the throne; the costly hangings of the throne-area caught first, and Krellig half-rose before the bolt of force caught him and hurled him back dead.

Herndon stood alone in the middle of the floor. His quest was at its end; he had

achieved his vengeance. All but the last: on himself, for having broken the oath he had involuntarily sworn to the Seigneur.

Life held no further meaning for him. It was odious to consider returning to a space-rogue's career, and only death offered absolution from his oaths.

He directed a blazing beam of force at one of the great pillars that supported the throneroom's ceiling. It blackened, then buckled. He blasted apart another of the pillars, and the third.

The roof groaned; the tons of masonry were suddenly without support, after hundreds of years. Herndon waited, and smiled in triumph as the ceiling hurtled down at him.

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SOME OF OUR BEST FRIENDS ARE MONSTERS

Around the INFINITY offices, we're used to monsters—there are several of the extraterrestrial type in the place all the time. So it shouldn't be surprising that we also enjoy meeting the frightier, more Earthly but less natural type—in print if not in person. That's why we suggest that you might find a few pleasant shudders in a brand-new magazine called MONSTER PARADE, a large-sized bi-monthly loaded to the covers with ghouls, werewolves, vampires, witches, and similar entertainingly gruesome types. It's a real bargain in stories with an 18th century graveyard tradition and a strictly modern touch in the telling. Look for it at the newsstand near your favorite corner cemetery.

BURDEN

the Hand

The clock was self-correcting—so

Van Ostrand's plot was foolproof!

By RANDALL GARRETT

ARENT you boys sort of biting the hand that feeds you?" asked Nikki Varden, staring complacently down the barrel of a Lundhurst Twelve while she kept both hands high above her head.

Van Ostrand was big and fat and had sleepy eyes and an oily manner about him that nobody with half a brain could fall for. I, personally,

would have picked him as the villain of a vidicast the first time he walked on the screen. He could have played the part to a T. The trouble with somebody who looks that much like the heavy is that your mind rejects the idea. You think to yourself, "I'll watch that guy because I don't trust him, but I doubt if he could really be as bad as he acts—nobody could."

Van Ostrand was. He gave a smooth, hardy chuckle and said: "You have a way with words, my dear. However, I have learned that it's perfectly possible to bite the hand that feeds one, provided it is bitten off cleanly at the wrist. Then, you see"—again that chuckle—"you can feed off the hand."

"My! What you can't do with a metaphor!" said Nikki Varden admiringly.

Van Ostrand said nothing but, "You will oblige me by turning around, my dear."

I had to admire the girl, even though she was being an insufferable little prig, acting as though she had too much money, too much beauty, too much talent, and not enough common sense.

There were five of us in the big house—Miss Varden, Van Ostrand, the mouse-faced Giles Jackson, the too handsome Bob North, and me. Van Ostrand herded the girl into the big living room; Jackson, North, and I tagged along behind. While the rest of them went on in, I stayed at the door, listening.

"Take care of her, North," Van Ostrand said smoothly.

North laughed in his rich, hearty way. "Just how do you mean that, Van?"

Van Ostrand looked painfully exasperated. "Please, Mr. North; I am much too old and too fat to be amused

by your lascivious humors. Put the handcuffs on her before she does something young and foolhardy and forces me to shoot her."

"Shoot me?" There was a sneer in Nikki Varden's voice. "You wouldn't."

I knew what she was thinking, and I hoped she wouldn't try to act on it, because she was wrong. If she wasn't careful, she'd be dead wrong.

Bob North jerked the girl's hands around and snapped a set of magnetic cuffs on them. She said something in a low tone that I didn't get, but it probably referred to either North's ancestry or his questionable birth. North just laughed and pushed her into a chair.

"I don't get you, Bob North," she said. "You and your good looks had me fooled. You should have married me for my money instead of pulling something like this."

Van Ostrand's chuckle came bubbling up from deep within his great, soft belly. "My dear Nikki, you are wrong on at least two counts. In the first place, if he attempted to go anywhere near a Registry Office for a mating certificate, he would be nailed for bigamy and desertion."

North looked suddenly angry, like a schoolboy faced with a tattletale. "That's enough, Van!"

Van Ostrand's piggish eyes and his soft voice both became suddenly cold. "Remember your place, Mr. North."

North subsided.

"In the second place," Van Ostrand went on, his voice soft and oily again, "we are all of the persuasion that there are more important things in life than money."

Nikki Varden had been basing her actions on the obvious fact that in order to get her to sign anything and get it through any of her big holding corporations, they would have to keep her definitely and indisputably alive and conscious. But if it wasn't her money that was wanted.

Her face went suddenly white. "What do you want?" she said, in an almost inaudible voice.

"For the nonce," said Van Ostrand, "only your continued co-operation. Believe me, dear child, we have no desire whatever to dispatch you untimely from this, our present sphere of corporal existence. On the other hand, we have no compunctions against it, either. Our choice will depend on your choice."

"What do you want?" she repeated. Her color was beginning to come back.

"Right now, you can just sit comfortably and relax. If you wish, I would be happy to turn on the tri-di. You can watch a program and take

your mind from your troubles."

"No thanks," she said.

SHE HAD only a small idea of what she was up against. I knew exactly what Van Ostrand was up to, and, for the moment, I was glad Nikki Varden didn't. She was scared enough as it was.

Jerome Van Ostrand was a lawyer, and a good one. Presumably, he worked for Marcus Varden Enterprises; I say "presumably," because obviously he didn't work *for* the company, but against it. Or at least, for himself only. I didn't know how much control he now had over Marcus Varden Enterprises, but I suspected that it was more than he was entitled to have. Nikki had gotten wise to him just a little too late.

But Van Ostrand had been prepared, even for that eventuality. Without Bob North inside to shut off the great mansion's electronic defenses, he would never have made it into the house alive, nor would he have been able to manhandle Nikki the way he had. But the way things stood, Jerome Van Ostrand was in complete control.

The silence became heavy. Giles Jackson, the mouse-faced little triggerman, shoved his gun into his pocket holster and sat down. He

lit a cigarette and stared at the tips of his shoes.

Van Ostrand rolled an expensive, pungent cigar in his round, fat face, while Bob North contented himself with looking at Nikki with obvious thoughts showing on his face. I just stayed at the door, being very quiet and wishing I could do something else.

Nikki couldn't take it. "For the love of God!" she shouted finally. "Say something! Tell me what you want!"

Bob North started to open his yap and make the obvious remark, but Van Ostrand cut him off with a wave of his pudgy hand.

"Your father," he said, after removing the cigar from between his heavy lips, "is a very great man. Indeed, one might almost say, a genius."

"What's my father got to do with this?" Nikki asked with irritation. "My father's been dead for seventeen years."

Van Ostrand looked at his cigar-end, approved of the ash, and looked back up at the girl. "Only legally," he said.

She gazed back at him uncomprehendingly.

"Your mother," Van Ostrand continued, "was, shall we say, something of a schemer."

"From you," snapped Nikki, "that's very funny."

The fat man chuckled hugely. "Indeed it is! I admit the

beauty of your penetrating witticism, my dear. No, compared with me, your mother was practically the epitome of virtue and guilelessness. But she had her path made easy, while I did not. I hardly think I could have managed to marry the great Dr. Marcus Varden!" He chuckled jovially at his own wit.

However, I had to agree with his last remark. I don't think he could have passed the physical.

"At least my mother was married to my father," Nikki said bitingly.

"Hoho!" the fat man laughed hugely. "You improve, my dear, really you do. Yes, indeed she was. And when she married Dr. Varden, she married a man who was already a millionaire several times over. He was not only capable of doing basic research into the laws of the universe, but of capitalizing on them. He was one of those truly rare persons, the all-around genius. It was as if Newton had been able to invent and use an antigravity device, or if Einstein had perfected the atomic bomb and sold it to the United States Government."

"Why are you telling me things I already know?" Vikki asked sarcastically.

The fat man looked astonished. "Why, my dear child! You screamed at me just a

few moments ago, wanting me to talk, to explain. I *am* explaining, but we have plenty of time"—he gestured at the big ornate clock on the wall—"so I'm taking plenty. Otherwise, I might finish the story too soon, and you would become bored again."

He took a puff from his cigar and blew a cloud of blue-gray smoke slowly toward the ceiling. "But if you insist on new data, dear girl, you shall have it. Did you know that your mother blew up your father's spaceship seventeen years ago?"

Even I perked up my ears at that one. It was a bit of Varden family history that I hadn't been aware of.

"Mother killed Dad?" Nikki laughed shortly. "You lie."

"I admit the charge," chuckled Van Ostrand. "I do. Frequently. Not this time, however. Besides, I didn't say she killed him; I said she blew up his ship, which is quite a different thing. Indeed, my dear, I am happy to say that your father has been alive for these seventeen years and is alive at this very moment."

Nikki looked at him silently for a long moment, then leaned back and closed her eyes. "I don't believe you, of course," she said calmly.

"Of course not," said the fat man. "Why should you?

But it's true, nonetheless. You see, your father—"

"Time, boss," interrupted the rodentish little Giles Jackson suddenly, pointing at the clock on the wall.

"So it is," said Van Ostrand. "You are very observant, Giles, my boy." He heaved his ponderous bulk out of the chair into which he had lowered himself and strolled rollingly over to the visiphone. He dialed a number. The screen lit up, but no face appeared. "Yes, Mr. Van Ostrand?" said a voice at the other end.

"Ah, you're there on time, I see," said the fat man. "Very good. We'll synchronize, then, for exactly twenty-five seconds after three. Understood?"

"Twenty-five seconds after three. Yes, sir." There was a click, and the screen faded.

THE FAT MAN looked even more jovial than ever. "All is going according to schedule, my children," he said as he lowered his bulging body again into the chair.

"Boy, I sure hope this works," said Bob North suddenly, as though he had thought about it for the first time.

"It'll work," said Giles Jackson sharply. "Mr. Van Ostrand figured it out, and he's got more brains than you and me put together."

"Your loyalty is touching, Giles," said Van Ostrand gravely, "and well within the bounds of truth." He dropped the remains of his cigar into a dispenser and watched it vanish. "I have worked on this ever since I found those papers ten years ago. And I have waited patiently for Dr. Marcus Varden to return. Nikki, my dear, when we first came in here after Mr. North had so kindly shut off the house's ingenious defenses, you thought I was going to force you to hand over to me the rest of the stock shares in Marcus Varden Enterprises, did you not? And for that reason, you were not in the least afraid that we would kill you. Why not?"

"You know perfectly well," said Nikki. "If I die or even become unconscious, my brain pattern won't register on the recorder at the Exchange Commission, and the transfer wouldn't be valid."

"Exactly. Your brain pattern is constantly being received by one of your father's greatest inventions—the sigma brainwave pickup. Your father began working on another modification of that device seventeen years ago—a sigma brainwave *sender*. A device that could impress one person's sigma signal upon the brain of another. A hypnotic, telepathic control, capable of controlling the mind

of anyone, over almost any distance. Can you imagine what a device like that would be worth? What it would mean in terms of power?" He looked at the girl. "Ah, I see you understand."

"Not completely," said Nikki. "Where is this device?"

"Ah," said the fat man. "That is a lovely story in itself. But, physically, the device—and the data on it—are in your father's spaceship."

"Then it was destroyed seventeen years ago," said the girl.

"No, indeed," said Van Ostrand. He gazed up at the ceiling as though he could gaze through it. "You father had *two* ships, my dear. One has been vaporized for nearly two decades; the other is up there somewhere, invisible and undetectable, in a satellite orbit around Earth. At precisely twenty-five seconds past three, an electronic mechanism will be activated in this house by that clock on the wall. That mechanism, in turn, will activate a corresponding device in your father's ship, if it is within range, and automatically land the ship here."

North laughed. "Only instead of landing here, he'll land at the spot we designate instead. Because five seconds before this signal is sent, our man will send a different signal keyed to another spot.

The ship will come down, and we will have imm—"

"North!" the fat man bel-
lowed.

Because Nikki had suddenly leaped to her feet and run toward the clock. She was trying to move the second hand with her head, since her hands were locked with magnetic cuffs. It didn't do any good; the steel hand went on; unperturbed.

BOB NORTH grabbed her by the hair and jerked her to the floor. Giles Jackson was on his feet, his gun aimed at her head.

"No, Giles!" Van Ostfrand snapped. Then, to the girl: "That was damnably stupid of you. In the first place, you might have been killed—accidentally. In the second place, that clock is automatically corrected every minute. It wouldn't do you any good to push it to an incorrect time, because it would be readjusted at the end of the minute. Watch." He pointed. The hand was nearing twelve. It passed it. Then, suddenly, it jerked back to twelve as the mechanism corrected it, and then went on again.

"North," said the fat man, "handcuff the wench to the sofa. We can't have any more of this."

North dragged her roughly across the floor and followed

the fat man's orders. Giles Jackson settled himself to his seat again and lit another cigarette.

I had listened silently all the time, and I figured I'd heard almost enough—but not quite. I kept hoping that Nikki would ask more questions.

She didn't have to. Van Ostfrand was in an expansive mood. He had become more and more jubilant as the time approached, and his jubilation loosened his tongue.

"You see, my dear, we don't want to lose a secret which may be even more important than the mind controller—the secret of immortality. Because that's why he put his ship into that orbit; that's why he surrounded it with so many protective devices; that's why he can't land it himself. Your father is in a coma, you see, and has been for seventeen years, while his body was being rejuvenated by a process known only to himself.

"If it was successful, he planned to return and rejuvenate your mother, using a process which renders the body immortal and eternally young, for all practical purposes. But your mother couldn't wait, so she had a duplicate of his ship blown up, and had the courts declare him dead. She wanted the money immediately. And a good thing it was, too; she

died six years ago, when you were nineteen."

"How do you know all this?" Nikki asked. "How *could* you?"

The fat man smiled. "From a friend, a very dear friend. And that, for now, is all I think you need to know."

I smiled thoughtfully. I had all I needed to know, too. I knew how he had gotten his information, and where it came from. It's nice to know who you can trust and who you can't.

The clock showed that I had ten minutes to do what had to be done. I backed away from the door and trotted back in the direction from which I had originally come upstairs from the sub-basement of the house. None of the others noticed me leaving.

IT WAS while I was in the sub-basement that I was actually surprised for the first time that night. I felt the faint vibration of a landing spaceship. But that couldn't be! It should have landed at the spot Van Ostrand had chosen unless something had gone wrong with his device.

In my own flesh this time, I headed up through the sealed tube, out of the prison where my body had lain, immobile, for seventeen years, buried, like the cicada, waiting for new life. When I reached the living room, it

was empty, except for Nikki. It took every bit of will power I had to stay away from her, but I didn't want her to be able to give anything away. I slipped in carefully so that the back of the sofa prevented her from seeing me.

I could hear the fat man's voice through the French windows as he, North, and Giles pounded toward the little antigravity-powered spaceship that had landed on the front lawn.

"It shouldn't have landed here!" Van Ostrand was bellowing. "We'll be detected here! They'll follow it in no time! They—" His voice was drowned out by a bellow of thunder as the police ships dropped from the sky.

"That ship is government property! Stay away, or we shoot!"

The three men knew that they'd be safe from almost anything inside that ship, so they kept going. They'd rather take the risk than lose their chance at having immortality or a mind control machine. I walked quietly over to a window and looked out.

Giles, the triggerman, was firing, accurately but ineffectively, at the police craft. The blue-hot beam of his Lundhurst was simply spattering off their shields.

A police beam winked down, and Giles Jackson was gone.

I hadn't known the fat man could move so fast. He was already at the airlock, tugging open the emergency unlocker. Bob North was right behind him.

Again the police gunner's beam found its mark.

But this beam touched the ship, too.

I turned away from the window and ran to Nikki. Her shock at seeing me didn't last long.

"Close your eyes!" I yelled. "Get behind that sofa!"

A glare of brilliant white lit up the landscape for miles around as my ship dissolved in a blaze of silent flame. The light seemed to come through the very walls of the house as the ship burned.

"The police will be blind for a while from that," I said rapidly. "Remember that you don't know anything. You weren't even told anything by anyone. The fat man came in here and held you prisoner, but you don't know why. Got that?"

"Yes, darling! Now hide, *quickly!*"

I did. I headed back for my secret sub-basement, and I didn't come out again for several hours. When I did, Nikki was waiting for me. We didn't speak at first; I was too busy kissing her.

"I STILL don't quite know what happened, Marcus," she

said afterwards. "I've thought, all these years, that you were in that ship."

"Not Marcus," I cautioned her. "Marcus Varden is as dead as his wife. From now on, you're Nikki Varden, and I'm Daniel Markell."

"Explain," she said. "The house defenses are up again. Not even the police can get in here." Then she giggled. "They were certainly surprised when that ship went up. They wanted to get the secrets of what was inside it just as much as Van Ostrand did."

"I'll bet. That's one of the reasons I did it this way. I was reasonably certain that not even the government could be trusted with a secret like this. That's why I left misleading information in the government vaults. That's where Van Ostrand got the information, by the way; he got the same mixture of truth and half-truth that I'd given them. Someone in high places is going to get burned for this."

"He thought I—or, rather, my mother—must have blown up your other ship, just to get your money."

"I know." I grinned. "I was listening all the time."

"But—how?"

"That sigma projector of mine. I used it on the cat. I just wanted to take a look around, before coming out in

my own body. And it's a good thing I did."

She opened her mouth, closed it, then laughed. "You mean that all the time puss was walking around the house watching us—all the time he was sitting near the door—that was *you* watching out of those slitted green eyes?"

"Right. While my body was down in the basement, I was walking around up here, being a housecat. You can see why that isn't a machine to trust just anybody with."

She nodded, and her face became suddenly somber. "The government couldn't be trusted either. But why couldn't you trust me? Why didn't you tell me you were here all the time, instead of out in space?"

"Because I had no way of knowing how well you could hold on to two identities during the Change," I told her. "If they had ever caught on that you were growing younger and that you were playing the part of both mother and daughter, they might have grabbed you and psyched the whole story out of you."

She nodded. "I see. But I was so worried about your being in that ship that I almost ruined the whole thing."

"How?"

"You didn't want the ship to come down here, did you?" she asked.

"No. I wanted it to follow

the signals of Van Ostrand's confederate. It would have burned when they opened the inner airlock, anyway. What did you do to bring it down here?"

"If you were the cat, sweetheart, you saw what I did." She looked suddenly very coy.

"You mean that bit with the head, when you tried to nudge the second hand? I don't quite see—"

"Magnetic handcuffs and bobby pins," she said.

Then I got it. Even a genius like me can see the obvious when you draw him a picture of it. She'd magnetized a bobby pin and let it stick to the second hand of the clock. The weight of it had been just enough to cause the clock to run fast when the hand was dropping from "12" to "6", and make it run slow when it was trying to go up the other side. The two cancelled each other out, so it was always almost correct when it was pointing straight up. But it took it only twenty seconds to get to the "6", and about forty to reach the "12".

"Very clever," I said. "I'm glad you didn't kill me with it. Once I get the sigma receiver-sender down to manageable size, we won't have to worry about either of us not knowing what the other is up to."

"Well, you're not going to work on it just yet," she said

emphatically. "First you'll have to establish your new identity. And then you'll have to marry me again. Nikki Varden is a very respectable and unspoiled girl."

I thought of all the years that I had lain in that tomb, while, due to the sex-linked differences in the rejuvena-

tion process of immortality, my wife had been fully alive. And I thought of men like Bob North who tried to push themselves onto helpless women. And then I realized that Nikki was not quite helpless. Respectable and unspoiled?

"She'd better be," I said.

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TALES FOR TOMORROW

The news this time is genuinely exciting. Coming next month is the first part of another two-part serial, and like those we've recently published by Richard Wilson and Robert Silverberg, it's a very special one indeed. The writer is none other than Phillip K. Dick, whose novels in pocketbook form have won him such wide acclaim. Now, for the first time, you'll be able to read his newest novel in magazine form—and we honestly believe it's his best yet.

Biography in Time begins very quietly, with scenes of what seems to be ordinary, everyday life in a typical American small town. There isn't even anything very unusual about the characters, at first glance, if you discount the fact that the hero makes

his living entering and winning a certain complicated newspaper contest. But things are not what they seem, and slowly, gradually, the surface of this ordinary world begins to flake away in spots—and we see the real, different and shocking world underneath. There's the ice cream stand that vanishes before the hero's eyes, for instance, and the telephone books listing non-existent numbers and exchanges.... You'll try as hard as he does to guess what it's all about, of course, but the chances are at least 100 to 1 against your guessing the right answer! You'll have to read on to the climax—you'll want to read on to the climax—and when you reach it, you'll find it one of the most exciting and imaginative in all science fiction. This is one you really don't want to miss!

By IVAR JORGENSEN

OZYMANDIAS

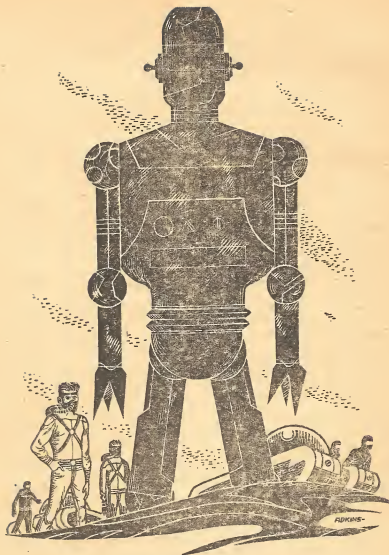
*There was open strife between the military
and scientific staffs. But which was mightier?*

THE PLANET had been dead about a million years. That was our first impression, as our ship orbited down to its sere brown surface, and as it happened our first impression turned out to be right. There had been a civilization here *once*—but Earth had swung around Sol ten-to-the-sixth times since the last living being of this world had drawn breath.

"A dead planet," Colonel Mattern exclaimed bitterly. "Nothing here that's of any use. We might as well pack up and move on."

It was hardly surprising that Mattern would feel that way. In urging a quick departure and an immediate removal to some world of greater utilitarian value, Mattern was, after all, only serving the best interests of his em-

Illustrated by DAN ADKINS



players. His employers were the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the United States of America. They expected Mattern and his half of the crew to produce results, and by way of results they meant new weapons and sources of strategic materials. They hadn't tossed in 70% of the budget for this trip just to sponsor a lot of archaeological putterings.

But luckily for *our* half of the outfit—the archeological putterers' half—Mattern did not have an absolute voice in the affairs of the outfit. Perhaps the General Staff had kicked in for 70% of our budget, but the cautious men of the military's Public Liaison branch had seen to it that we had at least some rights.

Dr. Leopold, head of the non-military segment of the expedition, said brusquely, "Sorry, Mattern, but I'll have to apply the limiting clause here."

Mattern started to sputter. "But—"

"But nothing, Mattern. We're here. We've spent a good chunk of American cash in getting here. I insist that we spend the minimum time allotted for scientific research, as long as we are here."

Mattern scowled, looking down at the table, supporting his chin in his thumbs and digging the rest of his fingers

in hard back of his jawbone. He was annoyed, but he was smart enough to know he didn't have much of a case to make against Leopold.

The rest of us—four archaeologists and seven military men; they outnumbered us a trifle—watched eagerly as our superiors battled. My eyes strayed through the porthole and I looked at the dry windblown plain, marked here and there with the stumps of what might have been massive monuments millennia ago.

Mattern said bleakly, "The world is of utterly no strategic consequence. Why, it's so old that even the vestiges of civilization have turned to dust!"

"Nevertheless, I reserve the right granted to me to explore any world we land on, for a period of at least one hundred sixty-eight hours," Leopold returned implacably.

Exasperated, Mattern burst out, "Dammit, why? Just to spite me? Just to prove the innate intellectual superiority of the scientist to the man of war?"

"Mattern, I'm not injecting personalities into this."

"I'd like to know what you are doing, then? Here we are on a world that's obviously useless to me and probably just as useless to you. Yet you stick me on a technicality and force me to waste a week

here. Why, if not out of spite?"

"We've made only the most superficial reconnaissance so far," Leopold said. "For all we know this place may be the answer to many questions of galactic history. It may even be a treasure-trove of superbombs, for all—"

"Pretty damned likely!" Mattern exploded. He glared around the conference room, fixing each of the scientific members of the committee with a baleful stare. He was making it quite clear that he was trapped into a wasteful expense of time by our foggy-eyed desire for Knowledge.

Useless knowledge. Not good hard practical knowledge of the kind he valued.

"All right," he said finally. "I've protested and I've lost, Leopold. You're within your rights in insisting on remaining here one week. But you'd damned well better be ready to blast off when your time's up!"

IT HAD BEEN foregone all along, of course. The charter of our expedition was explicit on the matter. We had been sent out to comb a stretch of worlds near the Galactic Rim that had already been brushed over hastily by a survey mission.

The surveyors had been looking simply for signs of life, and, finding none (of

course), they had moved on. We were entrusted with the task of investigating in detail. Some of the planets in the group had been inhabited once, the surveyors had reported. None bore present life. None of the planets we had ever visited had been found to hold intelligent life, though many had in the past.

Our job was to comb through the assigned worlds with diligence. Leopold, leading our group, had the task of doing pure archeological research on the dead civilizations; Mattern and his men had the more immediately practical job of looking for fissionable material, leftover alien weapons, possible sources of lithium or tritium for fusion, and other such militarily useful things. You might argue that in a strictly pragmatic sense our segment of the group was just dead weight, carted along for the ride at great expense, and you would be right.

But the public temper over the last few hundred years in America has frowned on purely military expeditions. And so, as a sop to the nation's conscience, five archeologists of little empirical consequence so far as national security mattered were tacked onto the expedition.

Us.

Mattern made it quite clear at the outset that *his* boys

were the Really Important members of the expedition, and that we were simply ballast. In a way, we had to agree. Tension was mounting once again on our sadly disunited planet; there was no telling when the Other Hemisphere would rouse from its quiescence of a hundred years and decide to plunge once more into space. If anything of military value lay out here, we knew we had to find it before They did.

The good old armaments race. Hi-ho! The old space stories used to talk about expeditions from Earth. Well, we were from Earth, abstractly speaking—but in actuality we were from America, period. Global unity was as much of a pipedream as it had been three hundred years earlier, in the remote and primitive chemical-rocket era of space travel. Amen. End of sermon. We got to work.

THE PLANET had no name, and we didn't give it one; a special commission of what was laughably termed the United Nations Organization was working on the problem of assigning names to the hundreds of worlds of the galaxy, using the old idea of borrowing from ancient Terran mythologies in analogy to the Mercury-Venus-Mars nomenclature of our own system.

Probably they would end up saddling this world with something like Thoth or Bel-Marduk or perhaps Avalokitesvara. We knew it simply as Planet Four of the system belonging to a yellow-white F5 IV Procyonoid sun, Revised HD Catalog #170861.

It was roughly Earthtype, with a diameter of 6100 miles, a gravity index of .93, a mean temperature of 45 degrees F. with a daily fluctuation range of about ten degrees, and a thin, nasty atmosphere composed mostly of carbon dioxide with wisps of helium and nitrogen and the barest smidgeon of oxygen. Quite possibly the air had been breathable by humanoid life a million years ago—but that was a million years ago. We took good care to practice our breathing-mask drills before we ventured out of the ship.

The sun, as noted, was an F5 IV and fairly hot, but Planet Four was a hundred eighty-five million miles away from it at perihelion and a good deal farther when it was at the other swing of its rather eccentric orbit; the good old Keplerian ellipse took quite a bit of punishment in this system. Planet Four reminded me in many ways of Mars—except that Mars, of course, had never known intelligent life of any kind, at least none that had troubled to leave a hint of its exist-

ence, while this planet had obviously had a flourishing civilization at a time when Pithecanthropus was Earth's noblest being.

In any event, once we had thrashed out the matter of whether or not we were going to stay here or pull up and head for the next planet on our schedule, the five of us set to work. We knew we had only a week—Mattern would never grant us an extension unless we came up with something good enough to change his mind, which was improbable—and we wanted to get as much done in that week as possible. With the sky as full of worlds as it is, this planet might never be visited by Earth scientists again.

Mattern and his men served notice right away that they were going to help us, but reluctantly and minimally. We unlimbered the three small halftracks carried aboard ship and got them into functioning order. We stowed our gear—cameras, pick-&-shovels, camel's-hair brushes—and donned our breathing-masks, and Mattern's men helped us get the halftracks out of the ship and pointed in the right direction.

Then they stood back and waited for us to shove off.

"Don't any of you plan to accompany us?" Leopold

asked. The halftracks each held up to four men.

Mattern shook his head. "You fellows go out by yourselves today and let us know what you find. We can make better use of the time filing and catching up on back log entries."

I saw Leopold start to scowl. Mattern was being openly contemptuous; the least he could do was have his men make a token search for fissionable or fusionable matter! But Leopold swallowed down his anger.

"Okay," he said. "You do that. If we come across any raw veins of plutonium I'll radio back."

"Sure," Mattern said. "Thanks for the favor. Let me know if you find a brass mine, too." He laughed harshly. "Raw plutonium! I half believe you're serious!"

WE HAD worked out a rough sketch of the area, and we split up into three units. Leopold, alone, headed straight due west, toward the dry riverbed we had spotted from the air. He intended to check alluvial deposits, I guess.

Marshall and Webster, sharing one halftrack, struck out to the hilly country southeast of our landing point. A substantial city appeared to be buried under the sand there. Gerhardt and I,

in the other vehicle, made off to the north, where we hoped to find remnants of yet another city. It was a bleak, windy day; the endless sand that covered this world mounted into little dunes before us, and the wind picked up handfuls and tossed it against the plastite dome that covered our truck. Underneath the steel cleats of our tractor-belt, there was a steady crunch-crunch of metal coming down on sand that hadn't been disturbed in millenia.

Neither of us spoke for a while. Then Gerhardt said, "I hope the ship's still there when we get back to the base."

Frowning, I turned to look at him as I drove. Gerhardt had always been an enigma: a small scrunchy guy with untidy brown hair flapping in his eyes, eyes that were set a little too close together. He had a degree from the University of Kansas and had put in some time on their field staff with distinction, or so his references said.

I said, "What the hell do you mean?"

"I don't trust Mattern. He hates us."

"He doesn't. Mattern's no villain—just a fellow who wants to do his job and go home. But what do you mean, the ship not being there?"

"He'll blast off without us.

You see the way he sent us all out into the desert, and kept his own men back. I tell you, he'll strand us here!"

I snorted. "Don't be a paranoid. Mattern won't do anything of the sort."

"He thinks we're dead weight on the expedition," Gerhardt insisted. "What better way to get rid of us?"

The halftrack breasted a hump in the desert. I kept wishing a vulture would squeal somewhere, but there was not even that. Life had left this world ages ago. I said, "Mattern doesn't have much use for us, sure. But would he blast off and leave three perfectly good halftracks behind? Would he?"

It was a good point. Gerhardt grunted agreement after a while. Mattern would *never* toss equipment away, though he might not have such scruples about five surplus archaeologists.

We rode along silently for a while longer. By now we had covered twenty miles through this utterly barren land. As far as I could see, we might just as well have stayed at the ship. At least there we had a surface lie of building foundations.

But another ten miles and we came across our city. It seemed to be of linear form, no more than half a mile wide and stretching out as far as we could see—maybe six or

seven hundred miles; if we had time, we would check the dimensions from the air.

Of course it wasn't much of a city. The sand had pretty well covered everything, but we could see foundations jutting up here and there, weathered lumps of structural concrete and reinforced metal. We got out and unpacked the power-shovel.

An hour later, we were sticky with sweat under our thin spacesuits and we had succeeded in transferring a few thousand cubic yards of soil from the ground to an area a dozen yards away. We had dug one devil of a big hole in the ground.

And we had nothing.

Nothing. Not an artifact, not a skull, not a yellowed tooth. No spoons, no knives, no baby-rattles.

Nothing.

The foundations of some of the buildings had endured, though whittled down to stumps by a million years of sand and wind and rain. But nothing else of this civilization had survived. Mattern, in his scorn, had been right, I admitted ruefully: this planet was as useless to us as it was to them. Weathered foundations could tell us little except that there had once been a civilization here. An imaginative paleontologist can reconstruct a dinosaur from a fragment of a thigh-

bone, can sketch out a presentable saurian with only a fossilized ischium to guide him. But could we extrapolate a culture, a code of laws, a technology, a philosophy, from bare weathered building foundations?

Not very likely.

We moved on and dug somewhere else half a mile away, hoping at least to unearth one tangible remnant of the civilization that had been. But time had done its work; we were lucky to have the building foundations. All else was gone.

"Boundless and bare, the lone and level sands stretch far away," I muttered.

Gerhardt looked up from his digging. "Eh? What's that?" he demanded.

"Shelley," I told him.

"Oh. Him."

He went back to digging.

LATE IN the afternoon we finally decided to call it quits and head back to the base. We had been in the field for seven hours, and had nothing to show for it except a few hundred feet of tridim films of building foundations.

The sun was beginning to set; Planet Four had a thirty-five hour day, and it was coming to its end. The sky, always somber, was darkening now. There was no moon to be still as bright. Planet Four had no satellites. It seemed a

bit unfair; Three and Five of the system each had four moons, while around the massive gas giant that was Eight a cluster of thirteen moonlets whirled.

We wheeled round and headed back, taking an alternate route three miles east of the one we had used on the way out, in case we might spot something. It was a forlorn hope, though.

Six miles along our journey, the truck radio came to life. The dry, testy voice of Dr. Leopold reached us:

"Calling Trucks Two and Three. Two and Three, do you read me? Come in, Two and Three."

Gerhardt was driving. I reached across his knee to key in the response channel and said, "Anderson and Gerhardt in Number Three, sir. We read you."

A moment later, somewhat more faintly, came the sound of Number Two keying into the threeway channel, and I heard Marshall saying, "Marshall and Webster in Two, Dr. Leopold. Is something wrong?"

"I've found something," Leopold said.

From the way Marshall exclaimed "*Really!*" I knew that Truck Number Two had had no better luck than we. I said, "That makes one of us, then."

"You've had no luck, Anderson?"

"Not a scrap. Not a potsherd."

"How about you, Marshall?"

"Check. Scattered signs of a city, but nothing of archeological value, sir."

I heard Leopold chuckle before he said, "Well, I've found something. It's a little too heavy for me to manage by myself. I want both outfits to come out here and take a look at it."

"What is it, sir?" Marshall and I asked simultaneously, in just about the same words.

But Leopold was fond of playing the Man of Mystery. He said, "You'll see when you get here. Take down my coordinates and get a move on. I want to be back at the base by nightfall."

SHRUGGING, we changed course to head for Leopold's location. He was about seventeen miles southwest of us, it seemed. Marshall and Webster had an equally long trip to make; they were sharply southeast of Leopold's position.

The sky was fairly dark when we arrived at what Leopold had computed as his coordinates. The headlamps of the halftrack lit up the desert for nearly a mile, and at first there was no sign of anyone or anything. Then I

spotted Leopold's halftrack parked off to the east, and from the south Gerhardt saw the lights of the third truck rolling toward us.

We reached Leopold at about the same time. He was not alone. There was an—object—with him.

"Greetings, gentlemen." He had a smug grin on his whiskery face. "I seem to have made a find."

He stepped back and, as if drawing an imaginary curtain, let us take a peek at his find. I frowned in surprise and puzzlement. Standing in the sand behind Leopold's halftrack was something that looked very much like a robot.

It was tall, seven feet or more, and vaguely humanoid: that is, it had arms extending from its shoulders, a head on those shoulders, and legs. The head was furnished with receptor plates where eyes, ears, and mouth would be on humans. There were no other openings. The robot's body was massive and squarish, with sloping shoulders, and its dark metal skin was pitted and corroded as by the workings of the elements over uncountable centuries.

It was buried up to its knees in sand. Leopold, still grinning smugly (and understandably proud of his find) said, "Say something to us, robot."

From the mouth-receptors came a clanking sound, the gnashing of—what? gears?—and a voice came forth, oddly high-pitched but audible. The words were alien and were spoken in a slippery singsong kind of inflection. I felt a chill go quivering down my back. The Age of Space Exploration was three centuries old—and for the first time human ears were hearing the sounds of a language that had not been spawned on Earth.

"It understands what you say?" Gerhardt questioned.

"I don't think so," Leopold said. "Not yet, anyway. But when I address it directly, it starts spouting. I think it's a kind of—well, guide to the ruins, so to speak. Built by the ancients to provide information to passersby; only it seems to have survived the ancients and their monuments as well."

I studied the thing. It *did* look incredibly old—and sturdy; it was so massively solid that it might indeed have outlasted every other vestige of civilization on this planet. It had stopped talking, now, and was simply staring ahead. Suddenly it wheeled ponderously on its base, swung an arm up to take in the landscape nearby, and started speaking again.

I could almost put the words in its mouth: "*—and over here we have the ruins*"

of the Parthenon, chief temple of Athena on the Acropolis. Completed in the year 438 B.C., it was partially destroyed by an explosion in 1687 while in use as a powder magazine by the Turks—"

"It does seem to be a sort of a guide," Webster remarked. "I get the definite feeling that we're being given an historical narration now, all about the wondrous monuments that must have been on this site once."

"If only we could understand what it's saying!" Marshall exclaimed.

"We can try to decipher the language somehow," Leopold said. "Anyway, it's a magnificent find, isn't it? And—"

I began to laugh suddenly. Leopold, offended, glared at me and said, "May I ask what's so funny, Dr. Anderson?"

"Ozymandias!" I said, when I had subsided a bit. "It's a natural! Ozymandias!"

"I'm afraid I don't—"

"Listen to him," I said. "It's as if he was built and put here for those who follow after, to explain to us the glories of the race that built the cities. Only the cities are gone, and the robot is still here! Doesn't he seem to be saying, '*Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!*'"

"*Nothing besides remains,*" Webster quoted. "It's apt.

Builders and cities all gone, but the poor robot doesn't know it, and delivers his spiel nonetheless. Yes. We ought to call him Ozymandias!"

Gerhardt said, "What shall we do with it?"

"You say you couldn't budge it?" Webster asked Leopold.

"It weighs five or six hundred pounds. It can move of its own volition, but I couldn't move it myself."

"Maybe the five of us—" Webster suggested.

"No," Leopold said. An odd smile crossed his face. "We will leave it here."

"What?"

"Only temporarily," he added. "We'll save it—as a sort of surprise for Mattern. We'll spring it on him the final day, letting him think all along that this planet was worthless. He can rib us all he wants—but when it's time to go, we'll produce our prize!"

"You think it's safe to leave it out here?" Gerhardt asked.

"Nobody's going to steal it," Marshall said.

"And it won't melt in the rain," Webster added.

"But—suppose it walks away?" Gerhardt demanded. "It can do that, can it not?"

Leopold said, "Of course. But where would it go? It will remain where it is, I think. If it moves, we can always trace it with the radar.

Back to the base, now; it grows late."

We climbed back into our halftracks. The robot, silent once again, planted knee-deep in the sand, outlined against the darkening sky, swivelled to face us and lifted one thick arm in a kind of salute.

"Remember," Leopold warned us as we left. "Not one word about this to Mattern!"

AT THE BASE that night, Colonel Mattern and his seven aides were remarkably curious about our day's activities. They tried to make it seem as if they were taking a sincere interest in our work, but it was perfectly obvious to us that they were simply goading us into telling them what they had anticipated—that we had found absolutely nothing. This was the response they got, since Leopold forbade mentioning Ozymandias. Aside from the robot, the truth was that we *had* found nothing, and when they learned of this they smiled knowingly, as if saying that had we listened to them in the first place we would all be back on Earth seven days earlier, with no loss.

The following morning after breakfast Mattern announced that he was sending out a squad to look for fissionable materials, unless we objected.

OZYMANDIAS

"We'll only need one of the halftracks," he said. "That leaves two for you. You don't mind, do you?"

"We can get along with two," Leopold replied a little sourly. "Just so you keep out of our territory."

"Which is?"

Instead of telling him, Leopold merely said, "We've adequately examined the area to the southeast of here, and found nothing of note. It won't matter to us if your geological equipment chews the place up."

Mattern nodded, eyeing Leopold curiously as if the obvious concealment of our place of operations had aroused suspicions. I wondered whether it was wise to conceal information from Mattern. Well, Leopold wanted to play his little game, I thought; and one way to keep Mattern from seeing Ozymandias was not to tell him where we would be working.

"I thought you said this planet was useless from your viewpoint, Colonel," I remarked.

Mattern stared at me. "I'm sure of it. But it would be idiotic of me not to have a look, wouldn't it—as long as we're spending the time here anyway?"

I had to admit that he was right. "Do you expect to find anything, though?"

He shrugged. "No fission-

ables, certainly. It's a safe bet that everything radioactive on *this* planet has long since decomposed. But there's always the possibility of lithium, you know."

"Or pure tritium," Léopold said acidly. Mattern merely laughed, and made no reply.

Half an hour later we were bound westward again to the point where we had left Ozymandias. Gerhardt, Webster and I rode together in one halftrack, and Leopold and Marshall occupied the other. The third, with two of Mattern's men and the prospecting equipment, ventured off to the southeast toward the area Marshall and Webster had fruitlessly combed the day before.

Ozymandias was where we had left him, with the sun coming up behind him and glowing round his sides. I wondered how many sunrises he had seen. Billions, perhaps.

We parked the halftracks not far from the robot and approached, Webster filming him in the bright light of morning. A wind was whistling down from the north, kicking up eddies in the sand.

"Ozymandias have remain here," the robot said as we drew near.

In English.

For a moment we didn't realize what had happened, but what followed afterward was a five-man quadruple-

take. While we gabbled in confusion the robot said, "Ozymandias decipher the language somehow. Seem to be a sort of guide."

"Why—he's parroting fragments from our conversation yesterday," Marshall said.

"I don't think he's parroting," I said. "The words form coherent concepts. He's *talk-ing* to us!"

"Built by the ancients to provide information to passersby," Ozymandias said.

"Ozymandias!" Leopold said. "Do you speak English?"

The response was a clicking noise, followed moments later by, "Ozymandias understand. Not have words enough. Talk more."

The five of us trembled with common excitement. It was apparent now what had happened, and the happening was nothing short of incredible. Ozymandias had listened patiently to everything we had said the night before; then, after we had gone, it had applied its million-year-old mind to the problem of organizing our sounds into sense, and somehow had succeeded. Now it was merely a matter of feeding vocabulary to the creature and letting it assimilate the new words. We had a walking and talking Rosetta Stone!

Two hours flew by so rapidly we hardly noticed their

passing. We tossed words at Ozymandias as fast as we could, defining them when possible to aid him in relating them to the others already engraved on his mind.

By the end of that time he could hold a passable conversation with us. He ripped his legs free of the sand that had bound them for centuries—and, serving the function for which he had been built millenia ago, he took us on a guided tour of the civilization that had been and had built him.

Ozymandias was a fabulous storehouse of archeological data. We could mine him for years.

His people, he told us, had called themselves the Thaiquens (or so it sounded)—they had lived and thrived for three hundred thousand years, and in the declining days of their history had built him, as an indestructible guide to their indestructible cities. But the cities* had crumbled, and Ozymandias alone remained—bearing with him memories of what had been.

"This was the city of Durab. In its day it held eight million people. Where I stand now was the Temple of Decamon, sixteen hundred feet of your measurement high. It faced the Street of the Winds—"

"The Eleventh Dynasty was

begun by the accession to the Presidium of Chonnigar IV, in the eighteen thousandth year of the city. It was in the reign of this dynasty that the neighboring planets first were reached—"

"The Library of Durab was on this spot. It boasted fourteen million volumes. None exist today. Long after the builders had gone, I spent time reading the books of the Library and they are memorized within me—"

"The Plague struck down nine thousand a day for more than a year, in that time—"

It went on and on, a cyclopean newsreel, growing in detail as Ozymandias absorbed our comments and added new words to his vocabulary. We followed the robot as it wheeled its way through the desert, our recorders gobbling in each word, our minds numbed and dazed by the magnitude of our find. In this single robot lay waiting to be tapped the totality of a culture that had lasted three hundred thousand years! We could mine Ozymandias the rest of our lives, and still not exhaust the fund of data implanted in his all-encompassing mind.

When, finally, we ripped ourselves away and, leaving Ozymandias in the desert, returned to the base, we were full to bursting. Never in the history of our science had

such a find been vouchsafed: a complete record, accessible and translated for us.

We agreed to conceal our find from Mattern once again. But, like small boys newly given a toy of great value, we found it hard to hide our feelings. Although we said nothing explicit, our overexcited manner certainly must have hinted to Mattern that we had not had as fruitless a day as we had claimed.

That, and Leopold's refusal to tell him exactly where we had been working during the day, must have aroused Mattern's suspicions. In any event, during the night as we lay in bed I heard the sound of halftracks rumbling off into the desert; and the following morning, when we entered the messhall for breakfast, Mattern and his men, unshaven and untidy, turned to look at us with peculiar vindictive gleams in their eyes.

MATTERN said, "Good morning, gentlemen. We've been waiting for some time for you to arise."

"It's no later than usual, is it?" Leopold asked.

"Not at all. But my men and I have been up all night. We—ah—did a bit of archaeological prospecting while you slept." The Colonel leaned forward, fingering his rumpled lapels, and said, "Dr.

Leopold, for what reason did you choose to conceal from me the fact that you had discovered an object of extreme strategic importance?"

"What do you mean?" Leopold demanded—with a quiver taking the authority out of his voice.

"I mean," said Mattern quietly, "the robot you named Ozymandias. Just why did you decide not to tell me about it?"

"I had every intention of doing so before our departure," Leopold said.

Mattern shrugged. "Be that as it may. You concealed the existence of your find. But your manner last night led us to investigate the area—and since the detectors showed a metal object some twenty miles to the west, we headed that way. Ozymandias was quite surprised to learn that there were other Earthmen here."

There was a moment of crackling silence. Then Leopold said, "I'll have to ask you not to meddle with that robot, Colonel Mattern. I apologize for having neglected to tell you of it—I didn't think you were quite so interested in our work—but now I must insist you and your men keep away from it."

"Oh?" Mattern said crisply. "Why?"

"Because it's an archaeological treasure-trove, Colonel.

I can't begin to stress its value to us. Your men might perform some casual experiment with it and shortcircuit its memory channels, or something like that. And so I'll have to invoke the rights of the archaeological group of this expedition. I'll have to declare Ozymandias part of our preserve, and off bounds for you."

Mattern's voice suddenly hardened. "Sorry, Dr. Leopold. You can't invoke that now."

"Why not?"

"Because Ozymandias is part of *our* preserve. And off bounds for you, Doctor."

I thought Leopold would have an apoplectic fit right there in the messhall. He stiffened and went white and strode awkwardly across the room toward Mattern. He choked out a question, inaudible to me.

Mattern replied, "Security, Doctor. Ozymandias is of military use. Accordingly we've brought him to the ship and placed him in sealed quarters, under top-level wraps. With the power entrusted to me for such emergencies, I'm declaring this expedition ended. We return to Earth at once with Ozymandias."

Leopold's eyes bugged. He looked at us for support, but we said nothing. Finally, in-

credulously, he said, "He's—of military use?"

"Of course. He's a storehouse of data on the ancient Thaiquen weapons. We've already learned things from him that are unbelievable in their scope. Why do you think this planet is bare of life, Dr. Leopold? Not even a blade of grass? A million years won't do that. But a *superweapon will*. The Thaiquens developed that weapon. And others, too. Weapons that can make your hair curl. And Ozymandias knows every detail of them. Do you think we can waste time letting you people fool with that robot, when he's loaded with military information that can make America totally impregnable? Sorry, Doctor. Ozymandias is your find, but he belongs to us. And we're taking him back to Earth."

Again the room was silent. Leopold looked at me, at Webster, at Marshall, at Gerhardt. There was nothing that could be said.

This was basically a militaristic mission. Sure, a few anthropologists had been tacked onto the crew, but fundamentally it was Mattern's men and not Leopold's who were important. We weren't out here so much to increase the fund of general knowledge as to find new weapons and new sources of

strategic materials for possible use against the Other Hemisphere.

And new weapons had been found. New, undreamed-of weapons, product of a science that had endured for three hundred thousand years. All locked up in Ozymandias' imperishable skull.

In a harsh voice Leopold said, "Very well, Colonel. I can't stop you, I suppose."

He turned and shuffled out without touching his food, a broken, beaten, suddenly very old man.

I felt sick.

Mattern had insisted the planet was useless and that stopping here was a waste of time; Leopold had disagreed, and Leopold had turned out to be right. We had found something of great value.

We had found a machine that could spew forth new and -awesome recipes for death. We held in our hands the sum and essence of the

Thaiquen science—the science that had culminated in magnificent weapons, weapons so superb they had succeeded in destroying all life on this world. And now we had access to those weapons. Dead by their own hand, the Thaiquens had thoughtfully left us a heritage of death.

Grayfaced, I rose from the table and went to my cabin. I wasn't hungry now.

"We'll be blasting off in an hour," Mattern said behind me as I left. "Get your things in order."

I hardly heard him. I was thinking of the deadly cargo we carried, the robot so eager to disgorge its fund of data. I was thinking what would happen when our scientists back on Earth began learning from Ozymandias.

The works of the Thaiquens now were ours. I thought of the poet's lines: "*Look on my works, ye mighty—and despair.*"

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REMEMBER!

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PLANET of ILL REPUTE

By A. BERTRAM CHANDLER

*It was against The
Act, but we had
been long in space,
and these women
were human. . . .*

I WAS WITH Commodore Pendray, when in the survey ship *Matthew Flinders*, he made his big sweep through the Sagittarius Sector. Find us worlds, they had told us when we set out from Earth. Find us worlds rich in metals, rich in timber, rich in animal life, worlds that will give us room and sustenance for our ever expanding population. Find us worlds—but don't forget The Act.

We did not forget The Act. We knew that to do so could mean, at the very least, professional ruin. And there was more to it than the legalities involved. I can say, with some pride, that it was the personnel of the Survey Service who

succeeded in impressing upon the Federation Parliament the crying need for such a law. We had seen too many worlds, planets whose people had been, until our coming, living in a state of Edenic innocence, ruined, their indigenous cultures destroyed by both the trader and the missionary. The Protection of Undeveloped Peoples Act stopped that. It stopped it by saying: *Hands off!* If the initial survey revealed no mechanized industry, no religion whose rites ran counter to absolute ethics—or no religion at all—then the people of such a world were protected from further contact and their planet became a proscribed planet. That is the law today, and in spite of the occasional outcries from both religious and commercial interests I don't think that it will ever be changed.

We were over eighteen months out from Earth when we found Lishaar. To say that it was a pleasant world is an understatement. It was beautiful, unspoiled, and to us, after a long, dreary succession of planets that were either too hot or too cold, too wet or too dry, it was paradise. We were all of us rather sorry when we discovered that Lishaar possessed intelligent life—all hands, from the Commodore down, had contemplated resigning from

the Service and turning colonist. The Lishaarians were human rather than merely humanoid, living in simple villages that we had not been able to see from our orbit around the planet. They were a highly civilized people, although theirs was essentially a Stone Age civilization. Their state of development, according to our ethnologist, was analagous to that of the Polynesians before they had been spoiled by contact with the white man.

We came to know them well during our survey of the planet. They were courteous and helpful and, once we had mastered their simple but musical language, told us all that we wished to know. They pressed gifts upon us—succulent fruits, a mildly intoxicating wine, garlands of flowers—not in the hope of anything in return, not with the feeling that they were propitiating gods from their almost always cloudless sky, but out of sheer, unselfish friendliness. We, of course, gave gifts in return—articles that, according to the experts, could have no bad effect upon them or their way of life. Any article of worked metal we—remembering the history of Polynesia—were careful not to give them, neither did we allow them to sample our own alcoholic beverages.

Our departure from Lishaar

was hasty. We had been, as I have said, a long time out from Earth and the Lishaarian women were very beautiful. Even though interbreeding was impossible, intercourse was not. The Commodore was, in many respects, a simple man and it never occurred to him that his officers would be capable of putting the matter to the test. When he made the discovery he was deeply shocked.

I remember the night well. It was during my watch—the Survey Service is run on naval lines—and I was lounging around the control room, high in the nose of the ship, looking out over the rippled sea on which the two western moons had thrown a twin path of golden light. On one side was the sea, and on the other the forest, and through the trees I could see, when I turned, the mellow lanterns that the Lishaarians hung outside their huts.

I stiffened to attention as the Commodore came up through the hatch.

"Barrett," he said, "do you hear voices?"

I looked at him. I had heard stories of what too long service in deep space did to one. But he seemed sane enough—sane, but with one of his famous rages in the gestatory stage. The crest of white hair was beginning to stand erect,

the vivid blue eyes were starting to protrude.

I listened.

I said, "I hear nothing, sir."

"Then come down to my cabin," he snapped.

I followed him down the ladder. It was against regulations for the control room to be left unmanned—but a Commodore on the spot piles on more Gs than a full Board of Admirals back on Earth. I followed him down to his cabin. I stood with him under the air intake.

I heard music at first. Somebody was playing recordings of the songs that had been popular back on Earth at the time of our departure. The sound, I realized, must be drifting through the ventilation ducts.

"Just music," I said. "It will be the junior officers having a party."

"Listen!" he ordered.

I heard, then, the unmistakable sound of a woman's laugh.

He stormed out of his cabin, down companionways and along alleyways, with myself following. He flung open the door of the room from which the noise of music and of laughter was coming. There were eight people there, smoking and drinking—four sub-lieutenants and four of the native women. Three of the women had lost the grass skirts that were their only

garments. All of them were drunk. One of them got unsteadily to her feet, flung her arms around the Commodore's neck and kissed him full on the mouth.

Commodore Pendray pushed the naked, golden-skinned woman from him, but used only what force was necessary.

"Gentlemen," he said, "if I may use that word when referring to you, that is... Gentlemen, the party is over, and you may consider yourselves under arrest. Mr. Barrett, see to it that the airlock sentry responsible is also placed under arrest. Get these women off my ship."

I managed it at last, although I had to turn out three of the crew to help me. I found, at the same time, another half dozen women in the crew accommodation. I thought that a mutiny was going to develop, but luckily some of the spacemen were sufficiently sober to realize what the penalty would be. To go out through the airlock in deep space, without a spacesuit, is one of the more unpleasant deaths.

At last I had the rapidly sobering, badly frightened females out of the ship. As the last of them staggered down the ramp the alarm bells were starting to ring and, vastly amplified, the voice of the Executive Commander was

bellowing, "Secure for space! All hands secure for space!"

ONE OF the sub-lieutenants was a friend of mine. I liked him, although we did not see eye to eye on most things. He was a misfit in the Service and was always talking of resigning his commission and transferring to the commercial side. His real ambition was to become a trader, to be a little king on a world like Lishaar, or as like Lishaar as a non-proscribed planet could be.

I was, I fear, responsible for his escape. After all, he had saved my life on Antares VI, had fought with his bare hands the vicious snow scorpion that had thrown me down and that would, save for his intervention, have pierced my body with its deadly sting. I owed my escape to him—so, when we were berthed on Calydon, our last refuelling stop on the way back to Earth, I cancelled the debt. There was little doubt, even then, what the outcome of the trial would be—dismissal from the Service and a few years on one of the penal planetoids. I knew that Watkins would deserve such a sentence but I did not want to see him serving it.

The organization of the escape was surprisingly easy—

a short circuit in the wiring of the electric locks to the cells, the posting of an air-lock sentry who was notorious for his sleepiness. Surprisingly enough, there were few repercussions. The sentry swore that he had been attacked and overpowered and was able to produce some convincing bruises—doubtless self-inflicted—in support of his story. The officer of the watch—myself—had seen nothing, heard nothing. There is little that one can see or hear of happenings at ground level when you are on duty in the control room of a spaceship four hundred feet above her tail fins. The alarms, of course, should have sounded when the short circuit made the locks inoperative, and the electrical engineer and his subordinates received a first class bawling out from the Commodore. I was sorry for them.

The local police were, of course, notified—but Calydon was then, and still is, a wild, frontier world that takes seriously only such crimes as horse stealing and, now and again, murder. They did not, obviously, regard the hunting down and arrest of four deserters from an interstellar ship, even a Survey ship, as a matter of great importance. When we blasted off a day later, nothing had been done in the matter and it was safe

to assume that nothing would be done.

I THOUGHT that I should never see Lishaar again. A proscribed planet is cut off from all interstellar intercourse, its peoples are left to develop in their own way and at their own speed. Landings are made at fifty-year intervals for inspection purposes, and that is all.

It was thirty years before I was proved wrong. Commodore Pendray was long since retired, but the old *Matthew Flinders* was still in service. Spaceships have longer lives than the people who man them. I was in her still, a full Commander, although I knew that I should get no further. The Lishaar incident had meant a black mark for all the officers who there at the time, and such black marks are as nearly indelible as makes no difference, and can never be erased by long and faithful service. I should, I knew, have been Captain of the old *Mattie* or of one of the other ships in the Service—and I would have been but for The Act.

Commodore Blaisdell was our commanding officer. He was a year or so my junior in age and was what I would never be, the complete martinet. Regulations were his gods, and the observance of them was, to him, the only

possible form of worship. He was a tall man, and thin, and with his pallor, his washed-out-blue eyes and his grey hair conveyed the impression of icy coldness. His manner was frigid when he sent for me to order me to prepare the ship for space.

I asked him what was happening. It was obvious that this was to be no routine voyage. Our refit was to be cut short and we were to find room, somehow, for a detachment of Marines.

He told me, but not until I had got astride as high a horse as was possible to one of my rank.

One of the Commission's Epsilon Class tramps, it appeared, had put in to Lishaar to recalibrate her Mannschenn Drive controls, a job that can be done only on a planetary surface. A shipmaster may, of course, land on a proscribed planet in an emergency. The tramp captain had carried out his recalibration, but an attempt had been made to detain his ship. There had been fighting, even.

I read the report. There was, I learned, a spaceport on Lishaar and a trading post. When the Commission tramp put in she found three other ships already there—two of them privately owned trading vessels out of Calydon and one of them a small passenger

liner from Waverley. The town that had grown around the spaceport combined the worst features of a red light district and an attraction for the lower type of tourist. There was an Earthman there who had set himself up as king. His name was Watkins.

I was to learn later how Watkins had made his way back to Lishaar. With his experience he had found it easy enough to get a berth as third mate in one of the decrepit tramps running out of Calydon, and had succeeded in interesting her skipper in the possibilities of trade with the proscribed world. He had been landed on Lishaar and had set himself up as a trader, and as more than a trader. He had developed local industries—the brandy made from the native wine became one of the main exports. He had turned his capital city—as it soon became—into the sort of place that catered to the lowest tastes of Man.

But all this I was to learn later during the long, and sometimes painful, business of finding out just what had happened, and how, and why. Some of it I had already guessed when with Commodore Blaisdell, the Marines at our heels, I marched into Watkins' palace. We did not expect to find him there—the fighting at the spaceport must have given him ample

warning of our coming. But he was there sitting in a large, luxuriously furnished room. He was alone.

In some ways he had changed a lot, in other ways very little. He had put on weight, but his brown, heavily tanned skin went well with the colorful loincloth that was his only garment. His hair was grey—but so was mine, what was left of it. His expression, the old don't-give-a-damn smile, was still the same.

He said, "Come in, gentlemen. Be seated. I'm afraid you'll have to help yourself to drinks—I sent my women away when all the shooting started out at the port." He got to his feet. "Why, Bill!" he exclaimed, advancing with outstretched hand, "I never recognized you, not with that brass hat and all that braid!"

I shook hands with him, ignoring the Commodore's icy glare.

Blaisdell said, "I hate to interrupt this touching reunion, Commander, but I have to remind you that this man is under arrest."

"I suppose I am," said Watkins. "Well—it was good while it lasted."

"Good?" flared the Commodore. "Good for whom? Good for you, perhaps, and for those scum from Calydon and Waverley. You've debauched these innocent people, Wat-

kins, and you'll pay for it." He said slowly, "Somebody once said—it was back in the days when spaceflight was only a dream—that Man, in his travels, will carry the dirt of Earth all over the galaxy on his boots. That's what you've done, Watkins."

Watkins smiled.

He said, "Look at those pictures."

WE LOOKED at them. One was an abstract painting, one of those things that are all form and color and meaning. The other was a conventional nude—a golden-skinned woman standing beside the sea. I know nothing of art, but I knew that neither of the paintings would have looked out of place hung on the walls of Earth's finest gallery. One does not need to be an expert to recognize quality.

Watkins touched a switch on the boxed machine standing beside his chair. Immediately there was music. We all listened to it. There was depth, and there was emotion; there was the black emptiness of space and the high whine of the Drive; there was the crushing weight of acceleration and the roar of the rockets....

"That was composed," said Watkins, "by one of my proteges. He did it after his first voyage in a spaceship." He

turned to me. "You remember what their music was like, Bill. Just a primitive thumping of drums accompanying not very tuneful voices.... These pictures, too, were painted by natives. Good, aren't they?"

"What," asked the Commodore, "are you trying to tell us, Watkins?"

"Just this," he said. "I may have brought the dirt of Earth here on my boots, as

you have told me—but good things grow from dirt."

"Take him away," said Blaisdell to the Marine officer. "There's no need for a trial. We'll hang him, in public, just to show all these people that we aren't to be trifled with."

Watkins paled, but his grin did not leave his face.

"Are you sure, Commodore," he asked softly, "that your own boots are clean?"

∞ ∞ ∞

FANGATHERINGS AHEAD

Metrocon 2, a fabulous fan festival for fans in the New York area, will be held Saturday and Sunday, November 1 and 2. The scene will be a motel on the outskirts of New York City, and the emphasis will be on informality and sociability. This will be the first gathering of its kind in the area, and many famous fans and pros are already planning to attend. For membership and details, send \$1.00 to Tom Condit, Secretary, Apartment 9, 64 Thompson Street, New York 12, N. Y. — or, if you're cautious, just write and ask Tom for further details. There will be very little planned entertainment, although a special preview of a foreign science fiction film is a possibility, but plenty of fun and fangab is guaranteed.

The annual open conference of the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society will be held November 15, at 2:00 p. m., at the Sheraton Hotel, 1725 Pennsylvania Boulevard (Phone LOcust 8-3300), Philadelphia's newest and largest hotel in the downtown section. For further information, write Mrs. S. Kolchak, 2104 Brandywine Street, Philadelphia 30, Pennsylvania. These PSFS conferences have become a tradition in fandom, and always offer stimulating speeches and discussions. Plan now to attend both of these affairs if you possibly can.

there was an old WOMAN--

Miss Mitchell had ideas—and 31 identical sons!

By ROBERT SILVERBERG

SINCE I was raised from earliest infancy to undertake the historian's calling, and since it is now certain that I shall never claim that profession as my own, it seems fitting that I perform my first and last act as an historian.

I shall write the history of that strange and unique woman, the mother of my thirty brothers and myself, Miss Donna Mitchell.

She was a person of extraordinary strength and vision, our mother. I remember her vividly, seeing her with all her sons gathered 'round her in our secluded Wisconsin farmhouse on the first night of summer, after we had returned to her from every part of the country for our summer's vacation. One-and-thirty strapping sons, each one of us six feet one inch tall, with a shock of unruly yellow hair

and keen, clear blue eyes, each one of us healthy, strong, well-nourished, each one of us twenty-one years and fourteen days old, one-and-thirty identical brothers.

Oh, there were differences between us, but only we and she could perceive them. To outsiders, we were identical; which was why, to outsiders, we took care never to appear together in groups. We ourselves knew the differences, for we had lived with them so long.

I knew my brother Leonard's cheekmole—the right cheek it was, setting him off from Jonas, whose left cheek was marked with a flyspeck. I knew the faint tilt of Peter's chin, the slight oversharpeness of Dewey's nose, the florid tint of Donald's skin. I recognized Paul by his pendulous earlobes, Charles by his squint, Noel by the puckering of his lowerlip. David had a blue-stubbled face, Mark flaring nostrils, Claude thick brows.

Yes, there were differences. We rarely confused one with another. It was second nature for me to distinguish Edward from Albert, George from Philip, Frederick from Stephen. And Mother *never* confused us.

She was a regal woman, nearly six feet in height, who even in middle age had re-

tained straightness of posture and majesty of bearing. Her eyes, like ours, were blue; her hair, she told us, had once been golden like ours. Her voice was a deep, mellow contralto; rich, firm, commanding, the voice of a strong woman. She had been Professor of Biochemistry at some Eastern university (she never told us which one, hating its name so) and we all knew by heart the story of her bitter life and of our own strange birth.

"I HAD A theory," she would say. "It wasn't an orthodox theory, and it made people angry to think about it, so of course they threw me out. But I didn't care. In many ways that was the most fortunate day of my life."

"Tell us about it, Mother," Philip would invariably ask. He was destined to be a playwright; he enjoyed the repetition of the story whenever we were together.

She said:

"I had a theory. I believed that environment controlled personality, that given the same set of healthy genes any number of different adults could be shaped from the raw material. I had a plan for testing it—but when I told them, they discharged me. Luckily I had married a wealthy if superficial-minded

executive, who had suffered a fatal coronary attack the year before. I was independently wealthy, thanks to him, and free to pursue independent research, thanks to my University discharge. So I came to Wisconsin and began my great project."

We knew the rest of the story by heart, as a sort of litany.

We knew how she had bought a huge, rambling farm in the flat green country of central Wisconsin, a farm far from prying eyes. Then, how on a hot summer afternoon she had gone forth to the farmland nearby, and found a fieldhand, tall and brawny, and to his great surprise seduced him in the field where he worked.

And then, the story of that single miraculous zygote, which our mother had extracted from her body and carefully nurtured in special nutrient tanks, irradiating it and freezing it and irritating it and dosing it with hormones until, exasperated, it subdivided into thirty-two, each one of which developed independently into a complete embryo.

Embryo grew into fetus, and fetus into child, in Mother's ingenious artificial wombs. One of the thirty-two died before birth of accidental narcosis; the remain-

der survived, thirty-one identical males sprung from the same egg, to become us.

With the formidable energy that typified her, Mother single-handed nursed thirty-one baby boys; we thrived, we grew. And then the most crucial stage of the experiment began. We were differentiated at the age of eighteen months, each given his own room, his own particular toys, his own special books later on. Each of us was slated for a different profession. It was the ultimate proof of her theory. Genetically identical, physically identical except for the minor changes time had worked on our individual bodies, we would nevertheless seek out different fields of employ.

She worked out the assignments at random, she said. Philip was to be a playwright, Noel a novelist, Donald a doctor. Astronomy was Allan's goal, Barry's biology, Albert's the stage. George was to be a concert pianist, Claude a composer, Leonard a member of the bar, Dewey a dentist. Mark was to be an athlete; David, a diplomat. Journalism waited for Jonas, poetry for Peter, painting for Paul. Edward would become an engineer, Saul a soldier, Charles a statesman; Stephen would go to sea. Martin was aimed for chemistry, Ray-

mond for physics, James for high finance. Ronald would be a librarian, Robert a book-keeper, John a priest, Douglas a teacher. Anthony was to be a literary critic, William a librarian, Frederick an airplane pilot. For Richard was reserved a life of crime; as for myself, Harold, I was to devote my energies to the study and writing of history.

This was my mother's plan. Let me tell of my own childhood and adolescence, to illustrate its workings.

MY FIRST recollections are of books. I had a room on the second floor of our big house. Martin's room was to my left, and in later years I would regret it, for the air was always heavy with the stink of his chemical experiments. To my right was Noel, whose precocious typewriter sometimes pounded all night as he worked on his endless first novel.

But those manifestations came later. I remember waking one morning to find that during the night a bookcase had been placed in my room, and in it a single book—Hendrik Willem van Loon's *Story of Mankind*. I was four, almost five, then; thanks to Mother's intensive training we were all capable readers by that age, and I puzzled over the big type, learning of the exploits of Charlemagne

and Richard the Lionhearted and staring at the squiggly scratches that were van Loon's illustrations.

Other books followed, in years to come. H.G. Wells' *Outline of History*, which fascinated and repelled me at the same time. Toynbee, in the Somervell abridgement, and later, when I had entered adolescence, the complete and unabridged edition. Churchill, with his flowing periods and ringing prose. Sandburg's poetic and massive life of Lincoln; Wedgwood on the Thirty Years' War; Will Durant, in six or seven block-like volumes.

I read these books, and where I did not understand I read on anyway, knowing I would come back to that page in some year to come and bring new understanding to it. Mother helped, and guided, and chivvied. A sense of the panorama of man's vast achievement sprang up in me. To join the roll of mankind's chroniclers seemed the only possible end for my existence.

Each summer from my fourteenth to my seventeenth, I travelled—alone, of course, since Mother wanted to build self-reliance in us. I visited the great historical places of the United States: Washington, D.C., Mount Vernon, Williamsburg, Bull Run, Gettysburg. A sense of the past rose in me.

Those summers were my only opportunities for contact with strangers, since during the year and especially during the long snowbound winters we stayed on the farm, a tight family unit. We never went to public school; obviously, it was impossible to enroll us, en masse, without arousing the curiosity my mother wished to avoid.

Instead, she tutored us privately, giving us care and attention that no professional teacher could possibly have supplied. And we grew older, diverging toward our professions like branching limbs of a tree.

As a future historian, of course, I took it upon myself to observe the changes in my own society, which was bounded by the acreage of our farm. I made notes on the progress of my brothers, keeping my notebooks well hidden, and also on the changes time was working on Mother. She stood up surprisingly well, considering the astonishing burden she had taken upon herself. Formidable was the best word to use in describing her.

We grew into adolescence. By this time Martin had an imposing chemical laboratory in his room; Leonard harangued us all on legal fine points, and Anthony pored over Proust and Kafka, delivering startling critical in-

terpretations. Our house was a beehive of industry constantly, and I don't remember being bored for more than three consecutive seconds, at any time. There were always distractions: Claude and George jostling for room on the piano bench while they played Claude's four-hand sonata, Mark hurling a baseball through a front window, Peter declaiming a sequence of shocking sonnets during our communal dinner.

We fought, of course, since we were healthy individualists with sound bodies. Mother encouraged it; Saturday afternoon was wrestling time, and we pitted our growing strengths against one another.

Mother was always the dominant figure, striding tall and erect around the farm, calling to us in her familiar boom, assigning us chores, meeting with us privately. Somehow she had the knack of making each of us think we were the favorite child, the one in whose future she was most deeply interested of all. It was false, of course; though once Jonas unkindly asserted that Barry must be her *real* favorite, because he, like her, was a biologist.

I doubted it. I had learned much about people through my constant reading, and I knew that Mother was something extraordinary—a fanatic, if you like, or merely a

woman driven by an inner demon, but still and all a person of overwhelming intellectual drive and conviction, whose will to know the truth had led her to undertake this fantastic experiment in biology and human breeding.

I knew that no woman of that sort could stoop to petty favoritism. Mother was unique. Perhaps, had she been born a man, she would have changed the entire course of human development.

When we were seventeen, she called us all together round the big table in the common room of our rambling home. She waited, needing to clear her throat only once in order to cut the hum of conversation.

"Sons," she said, and the echo rang through the entire first floor of the house. "Sons, the time has come for you to leave the farm."

WE WERE stunned, even those of us who were expecting it. But she explained, and we understood, and we did not quarrel.

One could not become a doctor or a chemist or a novelist or even an historian in a total vacuum. One had to enter the world. And one needed certain professional qualifications.

We were going to college.

Not all of us, of course. Robert was to be a bookkeep-

er; he would go to a business school. Mark had developed, through years of practice, into a superb right-handed pitcher, and he was to go to Milwaukee for a major-league tryout. Claude and George, aspiring composer and aspiring pianist, would attend an eastern conservatory together, posing as twins.

The rest of us were to attend colleges, and those who were to go on to professions such as medicine or chemistry would plan to attend professional schools afterward. Mother believed the college education was essential, even to a poet or a painter or a novelist.

Only one of us was not sent to any accredited institution. He was Richard, who was to be our criminal. Already he had made several sallies into the surrounding towns and cities, returning a few days or a few weeks later with money or jewels and with a guilty grin on his face. He was simply to be turned loose into the school of Life, and Mother warned him never to get caught.

As for me, I was sent to Princeton and enrolled as a liberal-arts student. Since, like my brothers, I was privately educated, I had no diplomas or similar records to show them, and they had to give me an equivalency ex-

amination in their place. Evidently I did quite well, for I was immediately accepted. I wired Mother, who sent a check for \$3,000 to cover my first year's tuition and expenses.

I enrolled as a History major; among my first-year courses were Medieval English Constitutional History and the Survey of Western Historical Currents; naturally, my marks were the highest in the class in both cases. I worked diligently and even with a sort of frenzied fury. My other courses, in the sciences or in the arts, I devoted no more nor no less time to than was necessary, but history was my ruling passion.

At least, through my first two semesters of college.

JUNE CAME, and final exam, and then I returned to Wisconsin, where Mother was waiting. It was June 21 when I returned; since not all colleges end their spring semester simultaneously, some of my brothers had been home for more than a week, others had not yet arrived. Richard had sent word that he was in Los Angeles, and would be with us after the first of July. Mark had signed a baseball contract and was pitching for a team in New Mexico, and he, too, would not be with us.

The summer passed rapidly. We spent it as we had in the

old days before college, sharing our individual specialties, talking, meeting regularly and privately with Mother to discuss the goals that still lay ahead. Except for Claude and George, we had scattered in different directions, no two of us at the same school.

I returned to Princeton that fall, for my sophomore year. It passed, and I made the homeward journey again, and in the fall travelled once more eastward. The junior year went by likewise.

And I began to detect signs of a curious change in my inward self. It was a change I did not dare mention to Mother, on those July days when I met with her in her room near the library. I did not tell my brothers, either. I kept my knowledge to myself, brooding over it, wondering why it was that this thing should happen to me, why I should be singled out.

For I was discovering that the study of history bored me utterly and completely.

The spirit of rebellion grew in me during my final year in college. My marks had been excellent; I had achieved Phi Beta Kappa and several graduate schools were interested in having me continue my studies with them. But I had been speaking to a few chosen friends (none of whom knew my bizarre family background, of course) and my

values had been slowly shifting.

I realized that I had mined history as deeply as I ever cared to. Waking and sleeping, for more than fifteen years, I had pondered Waterloo and Bunker Hill, considered the personalities of Cromwell and James II, held imaginary conversations with Jefferson and Augustus Caesar and Charles Martel.

And I was bored with it.

It began to become evident to others, eventually. One day during my final semester a friend asked me, "Is there something worrying you, Harry?"

I shook my head quickly—too quickly. "No," I said. "Why? Do I look worried?"

"You look worse than worried. You look obsessed."

We laughed about it, and finally we went down to the student center and had a few beers, and before long my tongue had loosened a little.

I said, "There is something worrying me. And you know what it is? I'm afraid I won't live up to the standards my family set for me."

Guffaws greeted me. "Come off it, Harry! Phi Bete in your junior year, top class standing, a brilliant career in history ahead of you—what do they want from you, blood?"

I chuckled and gulped my beer and mumbled something

innocuous, but inside I was curdling.

Everything I was, I owed to Mother. She made me what I am. But I was played out, as a student of history; I was the family failure, the goat, the rotten egg. Raymond still wrestled gleefully with nuclear physics, with Heisenberg and Schrodinger and the others. Mark gloried in his fastball and his slider and his curve. Paul daubed canvas merrily in his Greenwich Village flat near N.Y.U., and even Robert seemed to take delight in keeping books.

Only I had failed. History had become repugnant to me. I was in rebellion against it. I would disappoint my mother, become the butt of my brothers' scorn, and live in despair, hating the profession of historian and fitted by training for nothing else.

I was graduated from Princeton summa cum laude, a few days after my twenty-first birthday. I wired Mother that I was on my way home, and bought train-tickets.

It was a long and grueling journey to Wisconsin. I spent my time thinking, trying to choose between the unpleasant alternatives that faced me.

I could attempt duplicity, telling my mother I was still studying history, while actually preparing myself for

some more attractive profession—the law, perhaps.

I could confess to her at once my failure of purpose, ask her forgiveness for disappointing her and flawing her grand scheme, and try to begin afresh in another field.

Or I could forge ahead with history, compelling myself grimly to take an interest, cramping and paining myself so that my mother's design would be complete.

None of them seemed desirable paths to take. I brooded over it, and was weary and apprehensive by the time I arrived at our farm.

THE FIRST of my brothers I saw was Mark. He sat on the front porch of the big house, reading a book which I recognized at once and with some surprise as Volume I of Churchill. He looked up at me and smiled feebly.

I frowned. "I didn't expect to find you here, Mark. According to the local sports pages the Braves are playing on the Coast this week. How come you're not with them?"

His voice was a low murmur. "Because they gave me my release," he said.

"What?"

He nodded. "I'm washed up at 21. They made me a free agent; that means I can hook up with any team that wants me."

"And you're just taking a

little rest before offering yourself around?"

He shook his head. "I'm through, Kaput. Harry, I just can't stand baseball. It's a silly, stupid game. You know how many times I had to stand out there in baggy knickers and throw a bit of horsehide at some jerk with a club in his paws? A hundred, hundred-fifty times a game, every four days. For what? What the hell does it all mean? Why should I bother?"

There was a strange gleam in his eyes. I said, "Have you told Mother?"

"I don't dare! She thinks I'm on leave, or something. Harry, how can I tell her—"

"I know." Briefly, I told him of my own disenchantment with history. We were mutually delighted to learn that we were not alone in our affliction. I picked up my suitcases, scrambled up the steps, and went inside.

Dewey was cleaning up the common room as I passed through. He nodded hello glumly. I said, "How's the tooth trade?"

He whirled and glared at me viciously.

"Something wrong?" I asked.

"I've been accepted by four dental schools, Harry."

"Is that any cause for misery?"

He let the broom drop,

walked over to me, and whispered, "I'll murder you if you tell Mother this. But the thought of spending my life poking around in foul-smelling oral cavities sickens me. *Sickens.*"

"But I thought—"

"Yeah. You thought. You've got it soft; you just need to dig books out of the library and rearrange what they say and call it new research. I have to drill and clean and fill and plug and—" He stopped. "Harry, I'll kill you if you breathe a word of this. I don't want Mother to know that I didn't come out the way she wanted."

I repeated what I had said to Mark—and told him about Mark, for good measure. Then I made my way upstairs to my old room. I felt a burden lifting from me; I was not alone. At least two of my brothers felt the same way. I wondered how many more were at last rebelling against the disciplines of a lifetime.

Poor Mother, I thought! Poor Mother!

OUR FIRST family council of the summer was held that night. Stephen and Saul were the last to arrive, Stephen resplendent in his Annapolis garb, Saul crisp-looking and stiff-backed from West Point. Mother had worked hard to wangle appointments for those two.

We sat around the big table and chatted. The first phase of our lives, Mother told us, had ended. Now, our preliminary educations were complete, and we would undertake the final step towards our professions, those of us who had not already entered them.

Mother looked radiant that evening, tall, energetic, her white hair cropped mannishly short, as she sat about the table with her thirty-one strapping sons. I envied and pitied her: envied her for the sweet serenity of her life, which had proceeded so inexorably and without swerve toward the goal of her experiment, and pitied her for the disillusioning that awaited her.

For Mark and Dewey and I were not the only failures in the crop.

I had made discreet enquiries, during the day. I learned that Anthony found literary criticism to be a fraud and a sham, that Paul knew clearly he had no talent as a painter (and, also, that very few of his contemporaries did either), that Robert bitterly resented a career of bookkeeping, that piano-playing hurt George's fingers, that Claude had had difficulty with his composing because he was tone-deaf, that the journalistic grind was too strenuous for Jonas, that John longed to quit the sem-

inartistic life because he had no calling, that Albert hated the uncertain bohemianism of an actor's life—

We circulated, all of us raising for the first time the question that had sprouted in our minds during the past several years. I made the astonishing discovery that not one of Donna Mitchell's sons cared for the career that had been chosen for him.

The experiment had been a resounding flop.

Late that evening, after Mother had gone to bed, we remained together, discussing our predicament. How could we tell her? How could we destroy her life's work? And yet, how could we compel ourselves to lives of unending drudgery?

Robert wanted to study engineering; Barry, to write. I realized I cared much more for law than for history, while Leonard longed to exchange law for the physical sciences. James, our banker-manque, much preferred politics. And so it went, with Richard (who claimed five robberies, a rape, and innumerable picked pockets) pouring out his desire to settle down and live within the law as an honest farmer.

It was pathetic.

Summing up the problem in his neat forensic way, Leonard said, "Here's our dilemma: do we all keep quiet

about this and ruin our lives, or do we speak up and ruin Mother's experiment?"

"I think we ought to continue as is, for the time being," Saul said. "Perhaps Mother will die in the next year or two. We can start over then."

"Perhaps she *doesn't* die?" Edward wanted to know. "She's tough as nails. She may last another twenty or thirty or even forty years."

"And we're past twenty-one already," remarked Raymond. "If we hang on too long at what we're doing, it'll be too late to change. You can't start studying for a new profession when you're thirty-five."

"Maybe we'll get to *like* what we're doing, by then," suggested David hopefully. "Diplomatic service isn't as bad as all that, and I'd say—"

"What about me?" Paul yelped. "I can't paint and I know I can't paint. I've got nothing but starvation ahead of me unless I wise up and get into business in a hurry. You want me to keep messing up good white canvas the rest of my life?"

"It won't work," said Barry, in a doleful voice. "We'll have to tell her."

Douglas shook his head. "We can't do that. You know just what she'll do. She'll bring down the umpteen volumes of notes she's made on this experiment, and ask

us if we're going to let it all come to naught."

"He's right," Albert said. "I can picture the scene now. The big organ-pipe voice blasting us for our lack of faith, the accusations of ingratitude—"

"Ingratitude?" William shouted. "She twisted us and pushed us and molded us without asking our permission. Hell, she *created* us with her laboratory tricks. But that didn't give her the right to make zombies out of us."

"Still," Martin said, "we can't just go to her and tell her that it's all over. The shock would kill her."

"Well?" Richard asked in the silence that followed. "What's wrong with that?"

For a moment, no one spoke. The house was quiet; we heard footsteps descending the stairs. We froze.

Mother appeared, an imperial figure even in her old housecoat. "You boys are kicking up too much of a racket down here," she boomed. "I know you're glad to see each other again after a year, but I need my sleep."

She turned and strode upstairs again. We heard her bedroom door slam shut. For an instant we were all ten-year-olds again, diligently studying our books for fear of Mother's displeasure.

I moistened my lips. "Well?" I asked. "I call for a

vote on Richard's suggestion."

MARTIN, as a chemist, prepared the drink, using Donald's medical advice as his guide. Saul, Stephen, and Raymond dug a grave, in the woods at the back of our property. Douglas and Mark built the coffin.

Richard, ending his criminal career with a murder to which we were all accessories before the fact, carried the fatal beverage upstairs to Mother the next morning, and persuaded her to sip it. One sip was all that was necessary; Martin had done his work well.

Leonard offered us a legal opinion: it was justifiable homicide. We placed the body in its coffin and carried it out across the fields. Richard, Peter, Jonas, and Charles were her pallbearers; the others of us followed in their path.

We lowered the body into the ground and John said a few words over her. Then, slowly, we closed over the grave and replaced the sod, and began the walk back to the house.

"She died happy," Anthony said. "She never suspected the size of her failure." It was her epitaph.

As our banker, James supervised the division of her

assets, which were considerable, into thirty-one equal parts. Noel composed a short fragment of prose which we agreed summed up our sentiments.

We left the farm that night, scattering in every direction, anxious to begin life. All that went before was a dream from which we now awakened. We agreed to meet at the farm each year, on the anniversary of her death, in memory of the woman who had so painstakingly divided a zygote into thirty-two viable cells, and who had spent

a score of years conducting an experiment based on a theory that had proven to be utterly false.

We felt no regret, no qualm. We had done what needed to be done, and on that last day some of us had finally functioned in the professions for which Mother had intended us.

I, too. My first and last work of history will be this, an account of Mother and her experiment, which records the beginning and the end of her work. And now it is complete.

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by ROBERT SILVERBERG

STARBURST, by Alfred Bester. Signet, 35¢.

Alfred Bester first appeared on the science fiction scene in 1939, when he won a contest for amateur writers sponsored by *Thrilling Wonder Stories*. During the next few years his byline appeared on about a dozen sf stories, most of them undistinguished—with the significant exception of the *Unknown Worlds* novel, "Hell is Forever," which hinted at the later pyrotechnic style Bester was to adopt.

In 1950 he returned to the pages of the science fiction magazines, and since then his career has been strictly spectacular. Over the past eight years two novels and a handful of short stories have sufficed to establish him firmly as science fiction's most dazzlingly inventive writer.

In this, his first short story collection, we have one representative of his pre-war work plus ten stories written during the fifties. Of the eleven included in this Signet volume, two stories are trivi-

al, one is flatly bad, and the other eight begin at excellent and go upward from there.

The trivial ones are two new short-shorts never before published, "Travel Diary" and "The Diehard," both of them forgettable vignettes. The bad one is "The Rollercoaster," from *Fantastic*—a singularly incoherent boiled-down version of the "Vintage Season" theme.

But as for the others—

The earliest is the 1941 "Adam and No Eve," from *Astounding*—hardly dated at all, a vivid and unforgettable story of the man who destroyed the Earth. Also from *Astounding* (circa 1950) is "Oddly and Id," which embodies a theme also seen in several other of these stories, that of the man who always wins.

From *Star Science Fiction* comes the memorable "Disappearing Act," wry and sardonic and beautifully fashioned. And from *Fantasy and Science Fiction* comes a quintet of superb yarns, each excellent in its special way and

each a small classic. Here is "Of Time and Third Avenue," a brilliantly economical little yarn; "Hobson's choice;" "Star Light, Star Bright"—and the two best in the book, "5,271,009" (unaccountably retitled "The Starcomber"), and "Fondly Fahrenheit." The former is a high-spirited romp which methodically deflates all escapist fantasies for good; the latter is simply the story of a man and a murderous android, but more than that it's also a breath-taking technical experiment that is carried off with enviable success.

Bester can do things with words that don't seem possible until he does them. His stories are constructed with awesome skill. He deftly lets the air out of not only every cliché of science fiction but out of our entire culture. This is a book for fans to devour and for writers to study with care.

oo

VOR, by James Blish, Avon, 35¢.

Few science fiction writers have been as assiduous in mining their own published works for story material as James Blish. No less than five Blish novels published in the last three years have been based on earlier magazine stories. Unlike Abou ben

Adhem, this newest Blish opus does not lead all the rest.

Its source is a short novelet from *Thrilling Wonder Stories* of 1949, "The Weakness of RVOG," written in collaboration with Damon Knight. In expanding this to novel length, Blish has altered the background, shifting it from a reasonably distant future time to one more immediate, and he has added new characters, but the skeleton of the 1949 novelet still governs the plot of the 1958 novel. In brief, Blish has turned all of his prodigious technical skill toward a job of padding; it's a tribute to his abilities to say that the book is surprisingly good despite the padding.

The novelet dealt with the arrival on Earth of a formidable robot of extraterrestrial origin who communicates in colors—Red Violet Orange Green was his name in the 1949 version, Violet Orange Red in the new one. RVOG, or VOR, poses an unusual problem: he demands to be killed. But he is so fearsome a creation that Earth science is unable to handle him at all, until a shrewd astrophysicist guesses the gimmick solution.

To this skeleton Blish has welded the story of Marty Petrucelli of the Civil Air Patrol, who is on hand when VOR arrives and who ulti-

mately plays a part in his destruction. Blish supplies Petrucelli with a full set of inner conflicts—his wife, a calendar-beauty sort, no longer loves him, and a phobia keeps him from entering airplanes even though he's a CAP man. Much of the book is devoted to Petrucelli's troubles; Blish resolves the marital conflict satisfactorily, but relies on a whopping pulp cliché to deal with the airplane phobia: Petrucelli Overcomes His Fears at a crucial moment to Save The World.

To Blish's credit as a writer in the fine sense of detailed background he creates when writing of his Civil Air Patrol men. When he finally takes Petrucelli aloft at the novel's climax, the reader gets into the plane too. But the trouble is that none of this material has any special bearing on the speculative value of the novel; good as it is, it's simply mundane prose about the Civil Air Patrol and about Marty Petrucelli, not science fiction. But, of course, the writing bears the usual Blish trademarks of economy, precision, and scientific accuracy, and the story moves swiftly and well, reaching a considerable peak of excitement toward the end. But none of this altogether conceals the fact that the novel has the structure of an

inflated novelet, not a full-length story: there is but one major *science fiction* problem, and the rest, the domestic quarrel and the personal triumph and the extensive high-echelon bickering, is simply skilful padding.

VOR would make a first-rate Hollywood sf movie, virtually as it stands. It's also a readable and exciting novel, whose chief flaw is merely that it fails to reach the lofty standard set by its author in his previous books.

oo

WHO?, by Algis Budrys. Pyramid, 35¢.

Algis Budrys' third novel, and second this year, has much in common with the Blish book discussed above. For one thing, it is expanded from a short magazine story (of the same title, from *Fantastic Universe*). For another, it is written with great skill and care. And, for another, it likewise betrays its origin by failing to demonstrate the complexity of plot a true novel should have.

The story line, in the main, follows that of the 5,000-word original except that Budrys has discarded the snapper ending of the short story and replaced it with a less conclusive, more penetrating point. Lucas Martino, a brilliant American physicist, is

working on a classified project known only as K-88, in a laboratory near the borderline between Allied and Soviet territory in Europe, some thirty years hence. In the confusion following the sudden explosion of his laboratory, Martino is seized by the Russians, who interrogate him for two months and finally turn him loose.

But the Martino who returns from the Soviet sphere is not the Martino of before the explosion. Russian medical science has repaired his ruined body by providing him with a metal globe for a head and a prosthetic left arm, as well as an awesome interior power-plant. The question that vexes the Allied authorities is a neat one: if the Russians can thus repair an injured man, perhaps they can perform a similar operation on his mind. Is Martino still loyal, or has he been transformed into a Soviet spy? For that matter, is he Martino at all, or perhaps a synthetic substitute?

This problem is the core of the book. Shawn Rogers, an American Security man, has the job of shadowing the returned Martino and discovering the truth about him. The book's weakness lies partly in the fact that Rogers is close to a cipher as a character, partly in the fact that there is no underlying subplot to

provide counterpoint for Rogers' investigation. Budrys makes the novel length by interpolating chapters of Martino's pre-explosion past—written with compassion and keen insight, incidentally—and by shifting viewpoint to several subsidiary characters.

But though WHO? is structurally unsatisfactory as a novel, it makes a magnificent long novelet. Budrys at 27 is already leagues ahead of most of his contemporaries as a writer, because he sees his characters as people first and as figures in a plot secondarily. Lucas Martino is brilliantly realized in this book; not since C.L. Moore's 1944 *No Woman Born* has any writer so vividly described the reactions and problems of a human being surgically transformed into a non-human being. Budrys also has a good eye for contemporary *realpolitik*; every incident, every reaction in this book rings true. His Cold War of the near future is sharply delineated.

It's too bad that a book as well written as this one should lack the fullness of plot of a real novel; insight and prose of this caliber are always welcome, but a 60,000-word story is not necessarily a novel for all that. Since Blish and Budrys, two of the best we have, have come a cropper over the same diffi-

culty this month, perhaps the basic fault is that stories originally conceived for short lengths can not happily be inflated to novel-size, no matter how capable the writer.

∞

RECENT REPRINTS

SECOND FOUNDATION, by Isaac Asimov. Avon, 35¢. The third and concluding novel in the *Foundation* series, notable for its plot-twists and devious trickery. Ace Books published paperbacks of the first two novels; all three are available in hardcovers from Gnome Press.

∞

WORLDS APART, by J.T. McIntosh. Avon, 35¢. Original-

ly titled *Born Leader* when Doubleday published it in 1954. It's a smooth, almost glib tale of a colony in space, marred by a couple of glaring plot inconsistencies and by an occasional over-blandness of tone, but worth reading for its convincing characterization and detailed treatment throughout.

∞

THE SKYLARK OF SPACE, by E.E. Smith. Pyramid, 35¢. A flashy Powers cover fronts this creaky classic of science fiction's neolithic days—certainly a strange mating! Doc Smith has somewhat streamlined the novel for this paperback appearance, but it still reads as if it were written forty years ago, which it was.

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Go to Sleep, My Darling

By WINSTON K. MARKS

***If you're totally
convinced it's a
man's world, don't
read this. But
if in doubt...***

AT 46, BERTRAND BAXTER was a man's man, still struggling to adapt himself to a smotheringly woman's world. His work, selling sporting goods for Abernathy and Crisp Co., was his element. Not only was he an ex-All American tackle, but his abiding love for sports had led him into a business where he dealt almost exclusively with men.

Old Crisp had once told him, "Bert, if we had two more salesmen like you we could fire the other twenty. You have a sixth sense dealing with these coaches and school superintendents. They love you."

Yes, Bert Baxter could anticipate his male customer's requirements, objections, moods and buying habits with an almost clairvoyant insight. But give him a woman! He was licked before she opened his catalog.

Women found him attractive enough. His six-foot-four, square-jawed athletic prowess had given him the pick of the class of '29, including the statuesque Rolanda. But to marry a woman and to understand her were different matters: the former ridiculously easy, the latter bewilderingly impossible.

The easy familiarity he enjoyed with men of the slightest acquaintance was something he could never establish in his own home with his own wife and his own daughters. Fate, as if to further confound him, had presented Bertrand with four daughters.

Of all these females, Rolanda, Aileen, Grace, Norma and Annie, only two month-old Annie was currently making sense to Bert Baxter. That was because she was a baby, and not yet a female in the baffling sense of the

word. His other three daughters had had their turns, but as they emerged from infancy into childhood they became unmistakable girl-children almost with their first mama-papa lisps, and thereby removed themselves from Baxter's realm of fathomable human beings.

He lay sleepless one November night beside the gently snoring Rolanda, debating the wisdom of having induced her to try once more to provide him with a son. Although Rolanda was forty at the time, Annie had arrived without undue trouble, fitted immediately into the Baxter feminine regime and established herself in Bert's heart quite solidly, if only temporarily.

The misgivings that beset him were vague ones. Annie was the apple of his eye, but in a few short months she would add to the flooding tide of womanhood that swirled through his house, squealing, giggling, moping, hair-curling, nylon-rinsing, plucking, powdering, painting, primping, ironing, sweater-trading, lipstick-snitching and man-baiting.

Too soon—much too soon—dear, understandable little Annie would move off in her own miasma of perfume and verbal nonsense, leaving Bertrand once again a lonely man in his crowded home.

The illuminated dial said precisely two o'clock when a tiny whimper seeped through the adjacent wall from the nursery. Baxter was on the verge of slipping into a doze, but it brought his eyes open.

The two o'clock feeding!

He loved Annie dearly, but it was high time she was omitting the late feeding. It meant rousing Rolanda, who never heard the call. It meant lights and commotion, short tempers, bottle-banging in the kitchen. It meant disturbing the other girls, which occasioned a slipper-shuffling parade to the bathroom with attendant flushing, tap-turning, glass-rattling and ostentatious whispering that turned the hall into a rustling snake-pit.

Don't wake daddy! He has to get up early.

Indeed daddy had to get up early if he hoped to enjoy his shower in peace in the stocking-strewn bathroom.

"Go to sleep, Annie," Baxter said in the deep recesses of his mind. "Go to sleep, my darling," he urged gently. "Please don't start the circus! Let me rest. Go to sleep, my darling."

Annie's whimper faded. Stopped.

IN THE HAZY realm between waking and slumber, it didn't seem remarkable to Baxter. Not until he was

stuffing his briefcase the following morning did he recall that Annie had at last skipped her late feeding. The memory of his urgent, silent pleading with her came back, and he smiled to himself. If it were only that easy, he thought.

He had a strenuous day driving out to a rural school district and rounding up five members of the athletic board to complete a nice contract for basketball equipment. He dribbled an Abernathy & Crisp basketball around the gym twelve times for the coach, lugged four sample cases of uniforms up a flight of stairs, and made uncounted round trips to his distantly-parked station wagon for afterthought items to satisfy inquiries.

But he had energy enough to bowl all evening at the athletic club, of which he was a board director. When he arrived home at ten o'clock, a "bargain" in fireplace wood which Rolanda had purchased from a late peddler was heaped across the short driveway and had to be tossed into the basement before he could garage the car.

He had learned not to question Rolanda's bargains, regardless of the time of day or night they occurred. She welcomed such criticisms as occasions to strike for an increase in the household allowance. "Of course, I

wouldn't have to take advantage of these penny-savers that you say cause more trouble than they're worth—if we could afford another five dollars a week...."

So he changed clothes, threw in the wood, showered and sank gratefully into bed. Rolanda was still wiping on cold cream. He asked, "Would you please open the window before you jump in?"

"But it's cold out, dear."

"It's barely November," he pointed out. "We had that all out last year. Closed windows only during blizzards and high winds."

"I know, dear, but summer's just over, and our blood's still thin. Besides, we put on the electric blankets today."

Since, theoretically, expensive electric blankets were supposed to *add* to one's security against chilling, the argument detracted not a whit from Baxter's convictions, but he was too tired to pursue the annual debate about chilling-versus-fresh air requirements.

He inhaled the dense mist of aromatic, warm, humid boudoir essences and fell into exhausted slumber. His dream was a recurrent one wherein he wandered barefoot through an echoing chamber. He was a Lilliputian, searching the interior of Rolanda's skull, a great, empty, reverberating dome. He had no notion for

what he was searching, but all he found were the roots of her yellow hair sticking down through the pate.

The edge of his fatigue had just nicely worn off to that treacherous point, where to be awakened would result in hours of wakeful tossing, when the whimper came. It came again, and Baxter swam up from the depths until he was half awake.

"Sleep, baby!" he urged. "Close your eyes and go to sleep, my darling." His lips didn't move, and he was only dreamily aware of the foolish hope that his good luck of last night might be repeated.

It worked. Annie quieted, went back to sleep and stayed asleep until morning.

A WEEK later Rolanda remarked about it at the breakfast table. It did, indeed, seem that Annie had reformed her nocturnal habits; but Baxter knew better. Each night, now, at the first whimper he sent his silent, mental message winging through the plaster, lath and pink wallpaper to the pink baby under the pink blanket in the pink crib. Annie was still waking at two a. m. each night, but she was still complying with his soothing thought-appeals.

That night, the whimper found him sleepless again. Starkly awake, with eyes wide open, it seemed ridicu-

lous to repeat such a foolish, wishful-thinking process, and he refrained from doing so: Telepathy was nonsense!

The whimper grew in volume, welled up into a full-throated wail that prickled the short hairs of his neck. "Oh, no! Annie, for heaven's sake!"

Without thinking further on it he slipped into his silent pleading. "Go to sleep, baby. Go to sleep, my darling."

Annie had too much momentum to capitulate easily. He pleaded and cajoled, and finally he mentally hummed three stanzas of "Rock-a-Bye Baby."

The wail trembled and fell off into a few reluctant sobs. Annie was comforted, reassured. Annie slept.

FOR ALL his preoccupation with sports and other manly extroversions, Bert-rand Baxter was not unimaginative. His stunning victory on this seventh night was too dramatic to ignore. He said not a word about it to Rolanda, but the following night he deliberately stayed wide awake until Annie sounded off.

Instead of immediately flooding his infant daughter with the warm reassurance and pleading requests that she sleep, Baxter let his mind "feel" of the situation. He

spoke softly to her in his un-mouthed mind-talk, and for the first time he became aware of a tiny but positive mental response. There was a faint fringe of discomfort-thoughts—a weak hunger pang, a slight thirst, a clammy diaper. But mostly there was the cheerless darkness and a heavy feeling of aloneness, a love-want, an out-reaching for assurance.

As his thoughts went out he could sense that Annie *did* receive them and take comfort from them—and the little physical hungers and discomforts faded from her mind.

She felt reassured now, loved, petted, cosy and warm in the velvety gloom, in the restful quiet.

He sensed the peace that settled through her, and the same peace flooded through him, a rare sensation of security, understanding and blind trust.

Annie slept. Baxter slept.

AND THEN it was Saturday morning. Baxter stayed abed, yielding the bathroom to his three teen-age daughters. Annie was still asleep, too, so Rolanda was stretching leisurely beside him like a long, pink cat. Noticing the time, she raised to an elbow and viewed him with some concern. "No golf this morning? Aren't you well, Bert?"

Had he plunged out of bed

to forage for his golf shoes as usual, she would have grumbled about how it must be Saturday, and she wished that *she* had a whole morning off each week to *herself*.

He replied slowly, "Later, maybe. Want to rest a little bit. Don't stare! I feel fine. Just thinking a little."

She shrugged, put on her robe and entered the bathroom competition.

Baxter lay waiting, eyes closed, concentrating. Then it came. The sensation of gentle awakening. Light—at first just a diffused pink light, then outlines forming: the ceiling fixture, the yellow-billed ducks on the pale pink wallpaper, the round bars of the crib. The sensation of movement, stretching, a glorious feeling of well-being.

Annie was awake.

Then in rapid succession, the sensation of wet diaper, cramped toe, hunger pang, *hunger pang!*

Annie yelled.

The sound came through firmly and demandingly, interrupting Baxter's concentration and breaking the remarkable rapport, but he had proved to himself beyond all doubt what he had been dubiously challenging: *He had established a clear, telepathic entry into his daughter's mind.*

NOW HE was so excited

that he forgot himself and tried to explain the whole thing to Rolanda. She seemed to listen with half an ear as she assembled breakfast. She didn't understand, or she misunderstood, or she understood but disapproved—Baxter wasn't at all certain which it was. When he finished she simply paused in her oatmeal dishing, pulled her housecoat tightly about her and said, "Nonsense! You went back to sleep after I got up. You're dreaming these things. It is high time that Annie began skipping her night feeding."

But her eyes were narrowed cat-slits, and Baxter felt a positive warning in them. He felt that since creation, probably no man had actually penetrated a woman's brain to probe the willy-nilly logic that functioned there:—functioned well, for somehow things got done, but functioned in such a topsy-turvy manner as to drive a serious male insane if he pondered it too long.

He retreated to the morning paper and said no more about it. Before he left for the golf club he had another remarkable experience. He stepped into the nursery and stared down at the adorable little pink-cheeked Annie. He closed his eyes and sought her mind—and saw himself *standing above the crib—through her eyes!* It was

clear as a TV image. In fact he noted that he needed a shave and looked quite strange with his eyes closed.

IN THE days that followed Baxter became addicted to slipping into Annie's innocent little mind at almost any hour of her waking. At the office. In a customer's waiting room. Even out on the golf course while waiting for a slow foursome to tee off ahead. Distance was no obstacle to the telepathic rapport.

And he began to make fabulous plans. As Annie grew he would follow her mental progress, investigating every aspect of her thought processes to learn the key to woman kind's inexplicable mind. Through her eyes and other senses he would *experience* the woman's world as it impinged upon her, and one day he would fathom the deepest, eternal secrets of all womanhood.

Whether Rolanda divined his intentions Baxter never knew, but when Annie was three months old she suddenly began resisting her father's mental intrusion.

He first noticed it one evening right after Annie had been tucked in for the night. Baxter was pretending to doze in his leather chair in the den, but actually he had been keeping mental watch

until Rolanda cleared out of the nursery—for some reason he feared communing with Annie while his wife was in the room.

Rolanda had 'come out, down the hall, stopped in the open door of his den, and he had felt her gaze upon him for a long minute.

When she passed on without comment, Baxter sought to enter Annie's mind and enjoy her nightly snuggled-down feeling of contentment. He probed gently, and to his surprise he met a barrier, an impalpable resistance, a shutting-out that he had never encountered. He pressed more firmly. Dim perceptions began to come through to him, but they were dominated by displeasure emotion.

Annie cried out.

Baxter withdrew instantly, feeling somewhat guilty. Then he tried again.

Annie screamed.

Rolanda came down the hall, paused at his door and said, "What do you suppose is the matter with her tonight? She always drops off."

Without waiting for an answer, she passed down the hall to the nursery and comforted Annie to sleep. Baxter tried no more that night.

IT WAS the same each time he tried thereafter. Abruptly, Annie had become

irritable, intolerant of his probing. How she could understand what was happening mystified Baxter, but he was determined to retain contact. He kept pushing, gently but firmly, and although it brought on some furious yells, he succeeded in making at least one daily survey of his infant daughter's mind.

For a week Rolanda became increasingly hostile for no apparent reason. Baxter felt that the tension that grew between them was in some way connected with Annie, but his wife never spoke of it. Never a particularly demonstrative woman, she became even colder, and often he caught her regarding him with an enigmatical look of suspicion.

As a long-sufferer to her moods, Baxter had no fear that an open break might develop. His life was insured for \$75,000, and Rolanda was much too hard-headed to consider divorcing such a solid "producer" of bread and luxuries as she and her female brood had learned to enjoy.

Meanwhile, Annie's mind was becoming an even more fascinating field for exploration. In spite of her resistance, Baxter's shallow penetration revealed the amazing network of learning that daily increased her web of knowledge, experience and stimulus-response conditioning. Often Baxter pondered

what a psychologist would give for such an opportunity as this.

He became so bemused with his objective study that, the night Annie withdrew her barriers, Baxter fell into her mind like a lion into a game-hunter's animal pit.

HE WAS, again, in his leather chair. Rolanda had just put Annie to bed and passed his open door. He probed for Annie's mind and leaned the heavy weight of his own strong mind on the expected barrier. It was gone!

He sank deeply into his daughter's brain and caught his breath. He had forgotten what it was like, this total absorption with her physical and emotional sensations.

Annie was feeling good. Her stomach was full, she was warm, dry and pleasantly tired from her evening romp. She stretched and yawned, and a feeling of euphoria swept over Baxter.

Never had he completed such a transfer. He could feel every little primitive pleasure sensation that rippled through Annie's healthy, growing body. Conversely, two dozen trivial but annoying twinges, aches, pains and bodily pressures that slowly accumulate with the years vanished from his 46-year-old body.

The abscessed tooth that he

should have had pulled a month ago quit hurting. The ache from the slightly pulled muscle in his back faded away. The pressure from the incipient gastric ulcer in his stomach eased off and disappeared. All the tensions and minor infirmities that had slipped up on him, almost unnoticed with middle age, vanished; and Baxter knew once again the long-forgotten, corporeal ecstasy of a young, human animal in the rapid-growth stages.

HE AWOKE to see the fuzzy image of Rolanda over him. It was morning. Her face was faintly troubled, but she smiled with a rare warmth when he cooed at her. She caught him up in her arms, murmuring endearing sounds. Snuggled to her breast, he felt the satisfaction of a great subconscious yearning as the scented woman-smell pervaded his nostrils and her strong, warm arms cuddled him tightly.

There was the unpleasant business of a diaper change, during which he became sharply aware of hunger. He yelled lustily for food, and soon he was sucking hungrily on a deliciously flexible rubber nipple that yielded an ambrosia of warm sweetness.

A jumble of clear, high voices chirped familiarly in his ears, but he paid no at-

tention to the words as such. His bath was delightful, although he sneezed violently at the talcum dust afterward. Now the voices were silent except Rolanda's occasional soft words to him. Again he enjoyed his liquid meal and slipped into delicious slumber with the shades drawn.

VOICES awakened him. A man's voice mingled with his wife's.

"In here, doctor. We managed to carry him to bed, and he hasn't awakened yet."

Baxter heard the words with mild interest but no comprehension. The man's voice came through the wall of the nursery from the next bedroom, a low rumble of pleasant sound. "No sign of physical impairment. Resembles a catatonic trance. Strange. Heartbeat is rapid, light—respiration, too. Like a baby's. We'd better take him down to the hospital."

"Is it that serious?"

"Will be if he continues unconscious. He'll starve."

"I'll call the ambulance."

BAXTER fell asleep again. The chirping voices returned that afternoon, but there was a subdued air about them. For a few days the routine continued: eating, sleeping, eating, bathing, sleeping, eating—a wonderful, kaleidos-

copic fairyland of enjoyable sensations.

The subdued air disappeared, and the voices chirped loudly and happily around him again. All was pleasant, comfortable, secure.

Then one morning his heart beat heavily, awakening him from his nap. His eyelids tore open to a weird sight. Several strange men and woman stood around him. They were dressed in white, and he was in a hospital bed. As he traced a rubber tube from its stand-hung bottle down to his arm, a rush of unpleasant sensations, twinges, pains, stiffnesses swarmed back into him.

Reluctantly he heard the doctor speak and he tried to pay no attention. "The adrenalin did it. He's coming around, I think. No, dammit, he's closing his eyes again. Doesn't seem interested. I thought for a minute...."

Baxter clenched his eyes tightly and tried to ignore the burning emptiness of his emaciated stomach, the harsh roughness of the hospital sheets against his weak, bed-sore calves. The drug was fire in his veins, and his heart threatened to jump out of his breast.

Annie, where are you?

A soft, nonverbal little response touched his wracked brain, inviting him to return. He concentrated, blocking out

the muttering voices around him...

"—can't keep a man his size alive indefinitely with intravenous—better phone Mrs. Baxter—call a priest, too."

HE MADE it. He was back in the crib. Rolanda was pulling up the nursery shades terminating his nap. The phone was ringing.

"Be right back, sweetheart," Rolanda said. "Mother has to answer the phone."

Her voice came only faintly from the hallway in dull monosyllables. Then she was back, scooping him up in her arms. She sat in a rocker and looked down at him thoughtfully, a serious frown across her wide, white brow. "You poor little darling. You'll never know your daddy."

For an instant Baxter's consciousness flickered back and forth across miles of intervening space. A cold panic clutched his heart. He heard a sharp sob escape from Annie's lips, then Rolanda was rocking him and comforting him.

"Don't you worry, sweetheart. It's all right. We'll get along. Daddy's insured. And there's his service pension. We'll get along just *fine*."

An intuitive flash of horror chilled Baxter. He struggled to escape to his own brain, his own dying body, but now the barrier was up

again, not impalpable but tough and impenetrable.

The more he struggled the weaker he became. Sensations from the nursery began to fade. The light grew dimmer, and Rolanda's face became hazy. Frantically, he tried to withdraw from Annie's mind, but he was mousetrapped!

Was this Annie's doing? Was this the vengeance she took against her own father for his invasion of her privacy?

Or was it his own mind's refusal to face life again through the network of pain and misery of his adult identity? Infantile regression, the doctor had called it—but the doctor didn't know about Annie.

He could still feel the gentle rocking motion and his wife's arms holding him tenderly in the warm blankets.

"We'll get along just fine,

honey," she was saying. "When we get the insurance money we'll have a larger house and a new car."

Rolanda! For God's sake, make Annie let me go!

"And you'll have a pretty room all to yourself when you are older. And—and there's no reason why you can't sleep in my room tonight. Would you like that, Annie?"

Now the light was dimming fast, but Baxter sensed the glow of pleasure in Annie's tiny body and heard her soft cooing.

"Why, Annie," Rolanda's words came from a great distance, "you're smiling! As if you understood every word! Why, you little dickens!"

Annie stiffened suddenly, then she sighed and gurgled happily—as though she had just gotten something off her mind.

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REMEMBER!

INFINITY is now monthly!

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The ODDLY ELUSIVE BRUNETTE

It was love at first sight — all over the world!

By JOHN VICTOR PETERSON

CERTAINLY a faithful representation of a male simian cast in brass would, granted reasoning powers, have felt unusual trepidation if exposed to the Wisconsin weather that fateful winter morning.

I myself was inordinately glad that I lived in the project's Bachelor Officers Quarters only a short block from the UNACMEA/

WAGS installation and that my first experience with Wisconsin winter three years before had prompted the purchase of the thermo-parka I was then wearing.

UNACMEA/WAGS is, I realize, a formidable array of letters. Though quickly recognizable, of course, from constant stereonews repetition, it is usually not immediately decipherable except

by the UN which spawned it and the eggheads who maintain it.

I help maintain it. I also maintain that I'm not an egghead. Literally, that is. I do have a bushy albeit greying head of hair and a reasonably handsome (Mom always said) face beneath; otherwise the brunette might have—but first I must translate UNACMEA/WAGS. It's important.

When the United Nations finally established worldwide atomic control three years ago—in '65—it created the Atomic Control Monitor Establishment at its New York Headquarters with an Alternate installation here near Racine. Piecing together most of the capitals, the alternate set-up comes out UNACMEA. The WAGS, of course, is easy. W for Wisconsin. AGS for Alternating Gradient Synchrotron.

Everyone knows what an AGS is from the publicity given to the 25-Bev unit which went in at Brookhaven National Laboratories back in the International Geophysical Year. Pix of that 700-foot diameter horizontal doughnut were in all papers, mags and fax when it started producing anti-protons, anti-neutrons and, among the Long Island neighbors, a few tremulous anti-science folk.

Despite the parka I was shivering like a displaced

Hottentot on Pluto at aphelion as I approached the UNACMEA building next to the 1400-foot diameter rings of WAGS. Activating the Harlan sphincter, I stepped into the console room. I'd activated the parka's auto-ope when I realized that the last man out the night before, taking some dimpled weather gal's prognostications as utter veracity, had apparently kicked off the thermostat; the room was only slightly less frigid than external Racine.

Re-zippering, I kicked over the master switch to activate WAGS (which had to be operating when the other physicists arrived); then I beelined for the thermostat.

"You'd think," I said to the room's emptiness, "that certain sad sapiens of the genus homo would think more of personal physical comfort than the saving of infinitesimal quantities of fuel—"

Which is when there came from behind me a chattering but pleasant feminine voice saying, "C-c-cut the rec-c-criminations and g-g-get some heat in here b-b-but fast, prof-f-fessor!"

I was startled but turned slowly none the less, rationalizing that the place had been deserted when I'd entered and that no one else could be physically present since I'd entered alone and

the only door hadn't been opened since.

I fully expected to find one of the headquarters stenographers grinning at me over the closed circuit stereo from the Ad Building and I wasn't about to begin to feed her ego by showing startlement.

I faced instead a very much present, very much alive and very lovely raven-haired young lady who was in that remarkably provocative state of nearly absolute deshabelle that only the new Parisian sunsuits can provide. The young lady's excitingly rounded curves were, however, a rather curious blue and it had fleetingly occurred to me that she was an extra-terrestrial when my better sense came to the fore and I said rather inanely,

"You should be wearing more in Wisconsin this time of year!"

HER DARK eyes flashed and she wriggled her shapely shoulders angrily with interesting shock waves.

"Since when is this Wisconsin?" she cried. "It's HOAGS' exploding that caused this cold!" She paused. "Isn't it?"

"HOAGS!" I echoed. Things started to add then that by logic couldn't. HOAGS is a new installation, an accelerator where two streams of particles orbiting

in opposite directions were caused to meet head-on. Hence the HO.

HOAGS is at Cape Canaveral, Florida, whence American satellites have lanced spaceward since IGY. Cape Canaveral in February boasts the weather that permits if not cries for the abbreviated type of costume this gorgeous young damsel was wearing.

While I was thinking I was also listening and she was spluttering that her father was General Schoener of the Atomic Energy Commission and that he would have me suitably punished if I had kidnapped her—

"Now wait a sec," I said, throwing her my parka after a natural period of bug-eyed hesitation. "I wouldn't be about to kidnap anyone, least of all a flighty teenager."

"I'm twenty-one," she said, her eyes flashing with indignation, and proceeded to unfold the parka around everything save the tip of her cold-pink nose and her long curved legs. The elusive tip of her nose wasn't worth trying to follow as she buried her raven-haired head in the fur collar; there was more of the curvaceous lower extremities in view which merited and claimed my attention. Devoted attention.

"Well?" she said.

"Yes, thank you," I an-

swered, glad the heat—the furnace's thermal radiation, that is—was coming up.

"I mean, what'll we do?"

"I hadn't given that much mature thought," I answered, "but now that you mention—"

"Stop the parrying!" she cut in sharply.

"Parrying was farthest from my mind," I said.

She spluttered; then asked, "Are you telling the truth?"

"About what?"

"That this is Wisconsin."

"Yes; it certainly is."

"Well, what day is it and time?"

"Wednesday, February 14th, 1968 and—and precisely 8:25 a.m."

She was silent for a moment, letting the parka fall away from her lovely face; then she said, "But it was only a few moments ago, considering the difference in time zones, that I was at Cape Canaveral. They were activating HOAGS today and I was there with Dad. How—how could I possibly be in Wisconsin now?"

"That," I said, "is the question. With a capital Q. How could you possibly—"

I stopped in shock. Those dark eyes had been looking directly at me—and the image of them was planted on my retinal patterns like a commercial symbol lingering on a stereo tube—but she, eyes

and all—and I do mean *all*—was *gone*.

Just like that. Blinko. Not over and out. Just out.

I KNOW I acted irrationally then. I scurried around the quickly warming room, searching behind the proton beam accelerator, the control and monitor consoles, the relay racks and equipment cabinets, feeling that she just had to be somewhere!

The door opened. I whirled around expectantly. It wasn't she; it was George Herrmann, my assistant.

George regarded me searchingly, his lean face lugubrious.

"What gives, Bob?" he asked. "You look as if you'd lost the world!"

"Maybe I have," I said, leaping to the visifone.

George watched me button Miami Exchange and said, "You realize what Jack Hagen thinks about long distance calls!"

I ignored him. I realized all right. Hagen's project boss and has laid the law down plenty on the question of what he considers unnecessary calls—but how can a scientist operate if he can't call up others in his specialty when he gets the glimmerings of a new idea?

Miami answered and I asked for General Schoener at Patrick Air Force Base.

Priority. I've top secret clearance and I put my marked I.D. card on the pick-up, too.

Abruptly a brush-mustached frozen military face regarded me. "So you're Robert Mitchell of UNAC-MEA/WAGS," the face growled. "Well, make it short."

"It's about your daughter, General," I said.

The face became human.

"But what can you know about Elaine? You're in Wisconsin, aren't you?" And, at my nod, "Well, she vanished from here when we activated HOAGS. Don't—don't tell me—"

"Yes, she was *here*," I said. "Just a few minutes ago. Said that HOAGS exploded."

His twitching brows drew down. "It didn't explode. There was a defect in the ring and particles of antimatter we haven't yet named escaped. That was just before we missed Elaine! Now, Mitchell, are you sure she was there? Can you describe her?"

I felt that my descriptive detail was rather good, coming as it did from a confirmed bachelor whose attention had theretofore been devoted to scientific tomes and atom-smashers.

He nodded perplexedly as I finished. "Well, how do you account for it?"

"General," I said slowly, "I'm a research physicist and I certainly won't admit for a moment that it might have been an induced psionic manifestation. There's an answer in relativity, I'm sure. A logical answer. Right now I'm far aspace. I thought I knew anti-nucleonics but HOAGS has apparently spawned something research physicists haven't anticipated."

"Well, where is Elaine now? Where did she go?"

"I don't know," I answered dumbly. "But she didn't go, General; she was here and then wasn't. But let me try to find her, General. God knows I'll do my best!"

He surveyed my face carefully.

"I'm sure you will," he said. "Call me when you find her."

I nodded wordlessly and rang off.

DESPITE George Herrmann's admonitions re long distance calls, I immediately visifoned every AGS installation in the States.

The last call did it. I raised Al Benson in Phoenix, Arizona. He'd seen Elaine briefly. He'd been first in the control room at the Phoenix synchrotron and had just activated same when, bingo! she was there.

He had in fact been just

about to call me. She'd been wearing the parka which had stayed when she "left". He'd found my name stencilled on the parka's left breast. Said she'd said the "nicest" man had lent it to her.

Which was nice to hear.

"We've just got to find her," I said earnestly.

He looked at me quizzically. "Bob, my boy, is the old perennial bachelor's veneer cracking?"

I thought that one over. "I guess it is," I admitted. "Now, Al, any suggestions?"

"I'm essentially a computerman," he said. "Give me some data and I might come up with something."

I knew what HOAGS had been intended to do: guide streams of particles in a chainlike pattern through the influence of magnetic fields of alternating direction so that head-on collisions of particles would result. Theoretically this should yield energies as enormous as the satellites reported present in cosmic radiation in space. But what side effects might result from HOAGS' activation was difficult for even computers to conclude.

There were other data: times of vanishment; durations of presence here and at Phoenix; the fact that the parka had gone with Elaine from here to Phoenix but had

remained at Phoenix upon her vanishment there—

"She's drawn to an AGS unit upon its activation," Benson said. That was already obvious to me but I didn't say so; Al Benson keeps his computer pretty high up on a throne. He went on, "Your parka came here with Elaine because it had picked up some manner of static charge from her. For some reason it was discharged—degaussed, maybe—while she was here and so it stayed when she—er—didn't."

I had looked at the wall clock as he was talking. "Look, Al," I cried, "cut for now. Hanford AGS should have been activated a few minutes ago. I'm going to call Ted Sosnowski there. Out, boy!"

I rang Hanford, Washington.

Yes, Elaine had been there. Briefly: Sosnowski started to go into a rather ecstatic description of her undeniable charms but since he obviously had no datum to add I cut him off and rang Berkeley, California. The Bevatron had not been activated since the time of the accident at HOAGS; Berkeley had nothing to report.

I had George Herrmann bring me the secret files then, and was scanning the list of all synchrotrons in the world, known either through publi-

city or downright espionage (a few were operating without UN sanction), when the visifone buzzed.

It was General Schoener.

I briefed him and told him I was about to try visifoning all known AGS installations.

"Hold it up," he said. "I want to call the Pentagon. I think I can pull strings and get UNACMEA/WAGS fully activated."

"That would do it, General!" I cried. "I didn't think I'd stand a chance if I asked—"

"Look, Bob," he cut in. "Elaine's my daughter and I'm not having her flitting around fraternizing with every Tom, Dick and Harry even if they are Ph. D's. She made one mistake and I'm not having her make another."

"Mistake?" I asked.

"A pilot," he said. "Nice enough guy but it turned out he was already married and intended to remain so. Incidentally, Bob, you resemble him to a considerable degree."

"I *do*?"

I recalled the data. Elaine had been here for about *three* minutes but at Phoenix and Hanford only about *one* minute apiece. Was I a stabilizing influence? No, I reasoned, it couldn't be me. It must be WAGS. It's an odd 40-Bev job. Maybe its magnetic field had a partially

polarizing effect upon the anti-nucleonic factor.

"Please call the Pentagon, General—and, General, if—I mean *when*—we get Elaine back, would you consider me as a prospective son-in-law?"

"You get her back, Bob, and ask her the big question. If she says yes, well, fine! You look okay to me!"

"Thanks, General."

"Call me Mike," he said. "Out!"

IT'S A GOOD thing Mike Schoener's a four-star general; if he'd been a second lieutenant, his daughter would have bounced around the then infinitely sadder earth to the end of her years, pursued by the vagrant daydreams of a hundred bug-eyed physicists until gobbled benzedrine and tranquilizers took their toll of said dreaming BEP's.

As it was, it was afternoon here at Racine when Mike Schoener called back and told me to stand by for the activation of UNACMEA/WAGS.

I stood in the console room for half an hour while the monitor screens went on one by one until the five banks of them on the one wall were all aglow. The controller at UNACME in New York gave me the go-sign then and I said shakily, "This is Doctor Robert Mitchell at UNACMEA/WAGS, Wisconsin, U.

S. A. A strange phenomenon occurred here at 0822 hours today."

I paused, disconcerted by background voices translating my words into dozens of foreign tongues; then, steeling myself, I went on, concluding with the question, "Is Miss Schoener present at this moment in any one of your installations?"

There were noes, *nons*, *niets*, *neins*—and then a hesitant *oui* followed almost immediately by a resounding *da*.

My eyes went to the Siberian monitor—and Elaine was suddenly facing me on the screen, saying, "Doc, I'm in a lab in Russia and there's not a soul here who can speak English, just a bunch of leering old bearded men. I'm scared, doc, and—"

She wasn't there.

Sosnowski's voice came from Hanford, "She's here now, Bob. I cut the AGS out and then back in and bingo!"

Elaine was behind him, sporting a Cossack hat.

"Elaine, I would—" I started. And stopped. She wasn't there.

"*Du bist wunderschön*," a guttural voice proclaimed.

I swung to the Munich monitor. I didn't need a translation. Elaine was there and making an impression. She swapped the Cossack hat for a Tyrolean one which a

grinning Bavarian had been wearing—and vanished.

"*Elle est ici!*" a nasal tenor said. "*C'est la Sorbonne ou elle est. C'est DuBois qui parle. Ma foi! Elle est vraiment magnifique!— Mon dieu! Elle n'est plus!*"

Though sadly neglected since college days, my "knowledge" of French told me that Elaine had arrived, conquered and departed, leaving Monsier DuBois of the Paris AGS in a state of bemusement, indeed!

"Fellows!" I cried. "Someone's not playing fair! In the last few minutes, Miss Schoener has been in Siberia, in Hanford, Washington, U. S. A., in Munich, Germany, and in Paris. This—"

"She's back again!" Sosnowski cried from Hanford.

I swung to the Hanford screen. "Ted," I said, "stop switching the AGS off and on. It could be dangerous. The gauss level might even bring her to critical mass. You're playing with something we know little about."

Sosnowski rolled his eyes from the screen to Elaine. "Brother," he said, "this girl's always near critical mass! And I'm not playing. I'd be happy if she'd stay right here!"

But she wasn't there.

"*Ona krasavitsa*," a jubilant voice said.

The Siberia screen dis-

played a Russian doing the sabre dance before Elaine's eyes, and an interpreter somewhere in the vast UNACME network was helpfully murmuring, "She is beautiful."

At which point Monsieur DuBois said throatily to an abruptly materialized vision, "*Tu es belle. Reste ici, ma chère!*" And then swore with Gallic fluency as thin air alone vibrated to his impassioned words.

While Al Benson at Phoenix began a John Alden speech in my behalf.

I was silent, studying Elaine's lovely face as Al spoke to her. She was apparently enjoying every second of her fantastic flitting yet I could see perplexity deep in her dark eyes. I thought I could see a bewilderment, a lostness.

"Al," I said, "I've got to talk to her."

Was it wishful thinking or did I see a warmth leap into her face as she turned to see my image?

"Trust in me, Elaine," I said. "I'll bring you home."

"Home?" she asked.

"Yes, home—home to me," I said, naked longing in my voice—and, for all the world to hear, "I love you, darling."

"*Moi, aussi!*" Monsieur DuBois me-too'd in French.

"*Ich auch!*" came from Munich, plus, "*Bitte komme*

doch bald zuruck!" which, I gathered, was asking her to come back but quickly!

"I mean it!" I cried through Babel.

MY VOICE was lost in a storm of pleas, protestations, proposals, propositions, presentations and plain Ph. D. philanderings, during which Elaine's loveliness appeared briefly on the monitor screens for Paris, Leeds, Brussels, Hanford, Stockholm, Paris, Hanford, Phoenix, Munich, Hanford, Atomsk, Tokyo, Hanford, Madrid, Paris, Hanford, Paris, Hanford, Paris, Hanford—

"Sosnowski!" I cried, "and you, too, Monsieur DuBois! Stop! *Arretez!* Don't do it any more! *Ne faites-le plus!*"

The situation continued to pingpong. Hanford to Paris to Hanford to Paris.

Sosnowski said (while Monsieur DuBois was ardently proposing to Elaine at the Sorbonne), "I sincerely wish to marry the girl, Bob."

"So do I, Ted," I answered him. "May the better man—"

"The best man," he snapped back. "Don't forget DuBois!"

I cut my microphone and said quickly to Herrmann, "George, get the chaplain and get the mayor to bring over whatever personnel and forms it takes to get a marriage license. And, move!"

And a Russian roared from the Siberia monitor something that sounded like "*Mogoo ya zhenitsa s vashey dochery?*", which, promptly interpreted by a linguist on the network, resulted in "May I marry your daughter?"

I didn't burn; I blazed. My daughter, indeed! So my hair is greying. Prematurely, that is. I'm only twenty-nine.

I was in control of UNAC-MEA at that moment. Full control. I was vested with UN power and that's Power these days, despite the snide remarks you hear from certain quarters.

"Look," I said to the whole wide world. "You will all—repeat all—immediately deactivate every AGS unit. This is a direct order of the UN."

I was hopeful but—

Monsieur DuBois said it was an accident.

Sosnowski said he couldn't figure out how it happened that the Hanford AGS reactivated itself—

And a new and properly British voice said, "This is Gibraltar. I say, Miss Schoener is here. It was, I assure you, quite accidental. One of your flyboys is here to pick up a cargo of potables for your North African bases and mistook the AGS button for an intercom and—"

"This is Sosnowski. I'm sorry but—"

And an interpreter cut in, "Commissar Vladislav indicates that he will allow Miss Schoener to return if monitoring of the Soviet AGS installations will be permanently discontinued—"

"Gibraltar here. I'm rather afraid your pilot is somewhat out of hand—"

"*Mein liebbling, kannst Du nicht langer hier bleiben?*"

"*Ma chere, reste avec moi et je te donnerai le monde!*"

"Elaine," I cried, "wherever you are, answer me!"

At last, at long last, her voice said, "Yes, Bob?"

"Will you marry me?" I asked prayerfully and Munich got into the act with "*Willst Du nicht mich heiraten?*"

"Yes," she said so softly I barely heard.

I swung a frantic glance over my shoulder. His Honor the Mayor of Racine and subalterns were behind me.

"Elaine?" I yelled.

"Whoops!" she said; then, "I'm back at Hanford."

"Sosnowski," I said sharply. "You heard my order. You will not activate the AGS again!"

"I haven't been touching it for the last ten minutes," Sosnowski said. "There's something wrong with the activator; it's turning itself off and on at random."

"Then get a technician and damp the pile!"

"I'll do what I can," he said. "Anyway, Elaine's gone!"

Siberia was back in the act. Then Gibraltar. Then Munich.

"Elaine," I cried. "You're coming home—*now!*"

I cut the AGS; then reactivated it and she was here, oh! so wondrously close to me, and the mayor handed her a pen and she signed the marriage license and—

Sosnowski said he was sorry.

The chaplain arrived. I refuse to mention his name or faith; he asks for anonymity. Suffice it to say that he is a man of God and a man of science.

He looked at me questioningly and I nodded. The service began.

Elaine heard parts of the ceremony at sixteen different locations in the world. And my errant colleagues (bless them!), despite their playful reactivations of their AGS units, maintained a decent silence when the chaplain made the fateful invitation to that someone to speak now or forever hold his peace.

At last the chaplain said, "Do you, Robert, take this woman—there at Hanford on the monitor—to be thy lawful wedded wife?"

And I said, "I do," and hoped I didn't sound facetious as I added, "except that

she's at Gibraltar now!"

"Do you, Elaine, take this man Robert—"

And Al Benson cut in from Phoenix saying, "The computer says to degauss her, Bob!"

And I snapped on WAGS, full power—and Elaine was here, here beside me saying, "I do, I do, I do!"

And George Herrmann (bless him!) had degaussing equipment ready—

THAT WAS eleven months ago.

Now I am at the UNAC-MEA/WAGS console again and I am asking all the physicists in charge of AGS units throughout the world to listen, to understand and to help.

Flitting between them this morning is our two-months-old daughter. She inherited a little instability and a high gauss tolerance. Her mother's had her here at WAGS too often, too, I guess.

The little one's particularly disturbed now because she needs a change. Will someone please do the necessities fast?

Elaine's here and she's determined to go, too, figuring they'll wind up together and then, with your cooperation, I can bring them both back.

But, fellows, it would be easier if—

Elaine!

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Fanfare



IN RECENT issues of INFINITY, we reported the deaths of Henry Kuttner and C. M. Kornbluth, two of science fiction's best professional writers. Since then, two men of equally high stature in science fiction fandom have died, and it seems proper to include a few words about them here.

Vernon L. McCain, 30, died Tuesday, June 10, in Wenatchee, Washington, of complications following surgery.

McCain was born November 2, 1927, in Nampa, Idaho, and after graduating from high school there served with the U.S. Navy during World War II. Later he served as a Western Union relief manager, and for the past three years was employed by the State Welfare Department in Wenatchee.

He had been active as a writer and fanzine publisher for the past eight years, and had been one of the most active and best liked members of the Fantasy Amateur Press Association since Feb. 1951.

Many of his friends included tributes to him in their own fanzines. Bill Morse of Sher-

borne, Dorset, England, wrote: "I suppose every man has hundreds of nodding acquaintances, scores of chatting and travelling companions and half a dozen buddies to go out on the beer with. Few men have more than two friends, capable of reliable and impartial advice and able to be trusted with a confidence. McCain was my best friend; in the eight years I knew him he never once let me down, never took unfair advantage of a confidence; he made no capital of my ignorance of subjects where he was learned; he never pretended to greater knowledge than he had. He was generous in argument and could always see and admit his errors; he was consistent, too: I have a voluminous collection of his letters and once or twice went right back through them, thinking that he had earlier used the reverse opinion than the one he was now expressing, but each time I found I was wrong...."

"It is not easy to write about Vern so soon and still keep the proper tight rein on the emotions, but purple prose

does not belong in FAPA, and Vern would himself be the first to disapprove.

"His fiancée says, 'Vernon was so interested in so many things. He told me many times that he didn't see how an adult could ever be bored with life; there were so many things to do.'

"Life will not be the same without him."

Francis Towner Laney died Sunday, June 8, in Webster Groves, Missouri, of bone cancer. He is survived by his wife, Edith Campbell Laney. He dedicated his body to Washington University Medical School for cancer and medical research.

News of Laney's death did not reach fandom at large until somewhat later than that of McCain's, since Laney had not been active in fandom in recent years. Laney's influence on fandom during his active period had been so great, however, that he has become an almost legendary figure; and the announcement was a shock to many who know and love the fannish microcosmos.

Typical of the comments on Laney were those published in the weekly newssheet, *Fanac*, by Terry Carr: "Though Laney hasn't been active in fandom for years, one can't help feeling that his death is a loss to us all. Publisher of such landmarks in fan-pub-

lishing as *The Acolyte*, *Fan Dango*, and *Ah, Sweet Idiocy*, Laney was undoubtedly one of the most influential fans in the whole course of fandom's history. He was the driving force behind the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society-In-surgent philosophy that "Fandom is just a goddam hobby," and his often bitter comments on fandom and fans in *Shangri-L'Affaires*, and particularly in his fan-autobiography *Ah, Sweet Idiocy* have influenced fandom strongly. An often brilliant critic, a pungent humorist, a prolific publisher, and one of the finest natural writing talents in fandom's history (it is astounding to realize that *Ah, Sweet Idiocy* was composed on stencil), Laney's death will come as a shock to all who have read his fan writings."

Neither McCain nor Laney ever entered the professional science fiction ranks; to the best of my knowledge, neither of them ever tried to. Having read their fan writing, I feel sure that either one could have made the grade if he had chosen to. As it was, they were the kind of men who make fandom the unique thing it is—one of the most stimulating, refreshing, and generally rewarding offshoots of a literary field that has ever existed.—LTS

Feedback



THANK YOU for printing Robert Silverberg's "Recalled to Life", which will undoubtedly be one of the best of the year. Silverberg, in showing the rest of us what good science fiction really is, poses a very interesting question: What are we to think of a man who lies, cheats, and (in effect) murders to gain public acceptance of a new process that he sincerely believes to be beneficial.

It's the old ends vs means argument, but Silverberg gives it some thought provoking twists.—Al Sevcik, 120 East 85th Street, New York 28, N. Y.

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BY A SERIES of delays through publishers, agents, transworld communications and my own habit of not staying long enough in one place for my mail to catch up with me, I have only just heard officially of INFINITY's award to me for my novel *First on Mars*. I write immediately, however, to thank you for a very great honour.

I am sensible that the

honour is all the greater in that I am a comparatively unknown writer under my sf pseudonym of Rex Gordon, and that despite your awards to other British writers, competition on the American market is still with the best in the world. In the days when, as a Radio Officer in Cunard Line, I had the opportunity to make comparisons, I came to the conclusion that New York was the world's most competitive city.

That *First on Mars* is now being read in Norwegian and Japanese, therefore, does not count with me so much as that there is now on the way to me a plaque recording its success in the spiritual home of science fiction. For, make no mistake about it, Mr. Editor, though the French with Jules Verne, and the British with H. G. Wells, did much to lay the foundations of the craft, it was the Americans who really supplied the know-how. If we, the British, are coming in again at this late stage, it is because the older generation of American writers assume too much. They assume that their readers have already read their

Bradbury, their Lewis and their Burroughs, their H. G. Wells and their Jules Verne, and that they want something "new" and "different"—fancy, in other words, with all that difficult science left out.

But despite all the fancy and exotic imagination which has been applied to the subject, I agree with your book critic that you can't have science fiction without science. You can have some other kind of writing—poetry or horror—but just because such writing is not tied to reality by close scientific or technological reasoning, it tends to destroy itself. It becomes a game in which all the players cheat and the winner is he who shows most ingenuity in his cheating. This succeeds for a time as the readers are entertained by stories of increasing beauty or horror, but in the end it loses its audience. The exponents go too far. Instead of dealing with the scientific possibilities which may truly come in the life of any young person, and which are therefore quite as real to him as any study of the history of the past, the craft degenerates into fairy tales.

But it is not true that all the readers of science fiction today have read all the science fiction of the past. Nor is it possible that they can

go back, as it were, and read it. Brilliant as the early exponents of science fiction were, they simply did not have the facts at their disposal which are available to us today. They made mistakes and they made wrong guesses which destroy the reality of their stories for the modern reader, who knows that much of what was written prior to atomic discoveries and ICBM's simply is not so. The early stories have to be re-written in the light of modern knowledge, and when more knowledge is gained they will have to be written again, honestly and sincerely, and not on any assumption that the "science doesn't matter" or that all you have to say, to explain anything, is "I was playing about with a few parameters one day, and then..." If science fiction is a game, then it is a game that, like any other game, must abide strictly by its rules if it is going to survive and retain its interest. For if sf does abide by its rules then it is more like the kind of game they play in the Pentagon, a war game about future contingencies that may or may not happen.... It is not a game played by children in the junior grade.

In short, therefore, while I am conscious of the honour INFINITY has done me, and

the more pleased in that the citation given me by Mr. Knight coincides with my own views, I am also aware that I will have to live up to it. Hard as it may be, I will have to resist the temptation just to be fanciful for the sake of cheap effect. I will have to make it my business to know what is truly known about the stars and the planets and the universe as a whole, and to fit my stories within that framework. If there is something I don't know, or no one knows, and I make a wrong guess, that is just too bad and it will "date" my story quickly. But there is a difference between honest guessing and telling lies, and your award helps to convince me that the future of science fiction lies with the former, guesswork allied to knowledge, and not with fancy unsupported by any kind of fact.—S. B. Hough/Rex Gordon, Albion Place, Ponsanooth, TRURO, Cornwall, England.

(Your last sentence makes us feel that the Awards have not only served their intended purpose, but are paying unexpected dividends as well. Thank you, and let's hope that many young sf writers read this letter.—LTS)

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I SEE BY "Tales for To-
FEEDBACK

morrow" that along with part 2 of Silverberg's serial, "Respectfully Mine" by Randall Garrett will appear in the August INFINITY. I think that Silverberg is great and Garrett and Robert Randall are also terrific—though not as good as Silverberg. Randall is, I know, the name that Silverberg and Garrett use when they write a story together. But I've read somewhere that Garrett is a pseudoname of Silverberg's. Is this true? If so why? Is Silverberg trying to get us confused? *(The possibilities of compounding confusion are tempting, but I'll be honest. They are two different people, and easy to tell apart; Silverberg is the one with the beard.—LTS)* I for one have learned a lesson. I always thought that Silverberg was the best of the three. From now on I will read a story first, judge it, and then see who wrote it.

Speaking of Silverberg, he did an excellent job, in my opinion, on part 1 of "Recalled to Life." No mumbo-jumbo, black magic, or super-mysterious machines to do the resurrecting for him. Just simple enzymes. Oh the simplicity of it all! A real professional job. I can't wait to get my grubby little paws on part 2.

Who in the ever-lovin' blue-eyed world is Brian W.

Aldiss and where has he been hiding? (*Another British writer.—LTS*) Please, pretty please, pretty please with sugar-coated honey on it, bring him back in future issues. "But Who Can Replace a Man?" is one of the best things I have ever read. Keep publishing his works and you will be forced off this regrettable bi-monthly schedule and onto a bi-weekly one.

Kluga's illos are definitely improving.

The rest of the issue was excellent, as usual; especially the poems, in my opinion. —Mike Lypka, Jr., 25 Ontario Avenue, Plainview, N. Y.

P. S. Miss Helen L. Roake, who wrote the last letter in "Feedback" last issue (June), ought to write professionally. She has a beautiful style, excellent imagination, and a broad mind; this is evident by her letter. Some editor should get in on the ground floor. A word to the wise is sufficient, Larry.

oo

EVEN THOUGH I'm not exactly the letters-to-the-editor-type, I feel moved to get in my tuppence worth on the Emsh business.

Ever since—two years ago—a friend induced me to start reading science fiction

and fantasy along with mystery, crime, humor, and general-type stories, I have thoroughly enjoyed studying magazine covers by Ed Emshwiler (please forgive the spelling of his name). I bought every back-issue of *Galaxy* the publishers offered, and I had quite a bit of the man's art work to study. I then decided that he was definitely my favorite sf artist, and looked for his work everywhere.

As I began to buy other sf mags, I saw the work of Emsh in different settings, but he never disappointed me.

Then came INFINITY. I purchased my first copy—Mar.-Apr., 1957—solely because I took a fancy to the striking cover by faithful Ed. After reading three issues of your magazine, I ranked it tied for third place in the field and had a copy reserved at the newsstand for me.

Came the blow to the eyeballs. I couldn't tell you the issue, for I'm far too lazy to dig into my book and mag shelf 3rd row, but the illustration was one of a bronze-colored female bursting from a crate, and it depicted a scene from the yarn, "Accept No Substitutes", by Robert Sheckley. Well, that illustration made me quite woozey. It wasn't that the woman was nude, and it wasn't ex-

actly that her face looked as if she had just downed a cat-sup-coated slug. No, it was simply the picture as a whole. It looked extremely cheap. Cheap! For a magazine which is above several in the field, and below—only in my opinion, of course—no more than three other publications, the cover was out of place. I believe that that nudity had little to do with the effect. As a matter of fact, I'm afraid that it's beyond me to state exactly what *did* have to do with the effect. Perhaps it was partly the coloring, partly the angle. Anyway, it looked pretty shoddy to me.

Then your next cover came up to your standard. And they remained okay until your Aug., 1958 issue. Emsch's illustration of "Beauty Interrupted" by Fontenay brought back the exact same, well, "effect." The legs were fine, well-drawn, but the cover still looked like a refugee from other magazines I won't mention.

If you were to purchase one of my scripts, and, though I'm definitely not a name, chose it to be illustrated on the cover, I would be very, very happy to see Emsch do the job. But like the two covers I mentioned? Nope, 'fraid not.

Your cover-blurbs are sometimes frightening too.—Dick Ackelson, 3029 Dover

Street, Longview, Washington.

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RANK favoritism, that's what it is.

Do you know that INFINITY has now reviewed *The Seedling Stars* three times?: Once at length by you and/or Irwin Stein; once in capsule by Damon Knight; and now again at length by Bob Silverberg. None of the Infinity Award winners got that kind of treatment, by golly.

Now, before an enraged public descends upon you, you will doubtless want to erase the impression of ar-rant onesidedness which you have made, and I have a suggestion. I have written nine other books (some of them even older than *The Seedling Stars*), and it would be only fair for you to review each of them three times, too. This has the added advantage of keeping Bob in supply for the next two years on a monthly schedule, or for the next 4½ on a bi-monthly.

I feel sure that you will perceive the simple justice of this suggestion. Incidentally, I am now at work on an 11th book which, since it will be twice as long as any of the others, you will doubtless want to review six times.—Jim Blish.

(*The justice of the sugges-*

tion can't be questioned, but I don't believe either Silverberg or myself is really qualified to do the job properly. Now, if you will write the reviews, too...—LTS)

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I'VE JUST finished reading Bob Silverberg's serial, "Recalled to Life." So far this year it is the best serial I have read. The climax was astonishing and was a good logical one.

In the past few months I have noted an outstanding improvement in INFINITY and hope it will continue to do so.

The Infinity Awards on books were very interesting and informative.—Bill Duke-low, 1800 North Harrison, Hutchinson, Kansas.

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WHAT IS BILL Bowman? I always get the impression that he is some sort of amalgamation of sf artists. I never was really fond of him as an artist, but up until several months ago I thought he was a fairly *original* artist. Then, after an almost complete disappearance for a short time, he returned—a new but disappointing man. Now, I have no intention of saying that "this Bowman character, his figures are all

lopsided, no balance...look like they were all kicked in the you-know-what," etc., etc. I can no more accuse him of this fault than Mrs. Hill can of Ed Emsh. Truth of the matter is, Bowman is quite accurate.

My gripe is that he seems to have made an attempt to extract the better traits of several artists, but mainly Richard Powers and Emsh. It's no wonder that Alma Hill frequently confuses Emsh and Bowman. I occasionally do myself. He has adopted Emsh's method of facial expression, his general layout patterns, but most of all his method of designing mechanical objects. What prompts me to bring this subject up is your recent serial, "Recalled to Life," in which both the "Powers effect" and the "Emsh effect" were present.

Versatility is a quality in INFINITY which makes the magazine the pleasant change of pace that it is. I hope that in future issues of Bowman will come back into his own. By all means, keep Bowman; he has a particular "charm" which is good to have in a competitive field such as art. But, for gosh sakes, make him express himself creatively and freely.

Incidentally, long live John Schoenherr. He's great.—Tim Dumont, 30 Mun-

chausen Avenue, Bristol, Connecticut.

(At the moment, Bowman is in Wisconsin, working for his Master's degree, and I haven't yet been able to work out a satisfactory method for having him do illustrations via long distance. I hope to, though, because I think his work has improved steadily since he began, and part of his charm is due to a sincere love of science fiction, which isn't found in every illustrator.—LTS) —

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I'VE JUST finished your August issue, and I'd like to make a few comments.

The cover is a masterpiece: it illustrates exactly a passage from Fontenay's story, but suggests something entirely different that has quite a bit more drawing power. Although you state in the editorial that you are trying to sell the magazine to sf fans only, both the cover and the cover blurbs ("She triggered a star-trap" and "Terror lay beyond the grave") certainly suggest that you want to sell everyone. (I'm firmly convinced that only fans—i.e., people who love sf for its own sake—will ever become steady readers, but I also believe that the general populace holds lots of potential fans who haven't discov-

ered the field yet; and purely commercial considerations force me to try to attract such readers in as many ways as possible—but I'll try not to do so in offensive ways.—LTS) And, too, they have nothing to do with the stories (Hm? But Fontenay's original title for his story was "Star-Trap."—LTS.) I had to look twice to make sure that it wasn't one of your competitors, and two stores refused to sell it to little boys. In a third I got it only after a lengthy argument concerning the merits of science fiction, as everyone in the store watched scornfully.

I like your new paper a lot. I must admit that I've bypassed many of your previous issues because of a subconscious dislike of the coarse paper you've been using. And the same new paper also takes up less space in my bookcase, while giving me the same amount of material.

Just to prove that I read the fiction, my ratings on the stories follow: 1) "And Miles to Go Before I Sleep", 2) "Recalled to Life". 3) "Signed, Sealed, and Delivered", 4) "Respectfully Mine", and 5) "Beauty Interrupted."

Your previous book reviewer was a Knight in shining Armour (I never sausage frank-ness as his), and I'm

sorry to see him go, but I do like Bob Silverberg's fresh approach in his reviews. He is neither too cynical nor too patronizing, and he held my interest throughout.

I must challenge Jack Jones' letter in "Feedback." Although I think the machinery, Bems, and designs of Emsh are superb, his humans leave much to be desired in my estimation. So many of his best pictures are ruined by the humans, who lack the novelty of the rest of the picture, and give it a dull effect. The only persons who would fit in with the rest of his slightly surrealist pictures are Hannes Bok's odd humans.

I wish that you would try to publish your letter section in half-size lettering. More letters could be published that way. When *Startling* did it no one disliked it, and most people thought it was a good idea. Another suggestion: why not have a summary of all other letters received after the regular letter section?—John W. Thiel, 2934 Wilshire Boulevard, Markham, Illinois.

(We're using a new typeface throughout the magazine now, and thus giving you somewhat more wordage than before. Anything smaller would be pretty hard on the eyes. I'll consider the summary idea, but sincerely feel

that virtually all of the really meaningful and/or entertaining letters are being printed as is.—LTS)

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LATE FLASH! On the evening of the day I sent the final copy for this issue to the printer I received the following telegram from Robert Silverberg, who is at the 16th World Science Fiction Convention in Los Angeles:

300 AT LOS ANGELES
DETROIT WINS BY
LANDSLIDE WSFS INC
DISSOLVED—ROBERT
SILVERBERG

This means that the convention was smaller than other Stateside cons in recent years (though probably no less fun), that next year's con will be in Detroit (which makes me very happy); and that the incorporated body known as the World Science Fiction Society is no more (which many people feel is a good thing, since the society was so embroiled in feuds and red tape). Next issue's "Fanfare" will be a full report on the 16th Worldcon by Silverberg. I'm looking forward to reading it myself, as I wasn't able to make it to Los Angeles. I'm sure you'll enjoy it too.—LTS

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Too
Can be a
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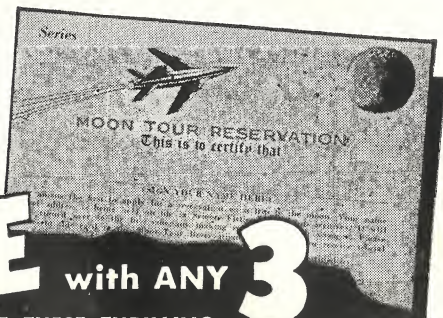
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